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THE HEART TO FIND

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The Heart To Find

BY

Hazel Heidergott

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A WARTIME BOOK

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FOR
My Mother

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1

THE GIRL SAT IN THE CORNER, REGARDING HER COCKTAIL glass soberly. She was an attractive girl, with gold-brown hair and hazel eyes, now deeply shadowed. Colin thought she was beautiful, and catalogued her with his writer's eye—a tall, slim girl, in a dusty-pink evening dress, and large-sleeved white jacket—an interesting girl, with a lean, intelligent face.

She spoke, presently—rather more to herself than to him. “The bride was lovely in white satin and rose-point lace—the defeated candidate, with her customary impeccable taste, wore a simple but smart gown of sackcloth trimmed with ashes. She carried an appropriate bouquet of bleeding-hearts ——”

She looked at him, then, and her eyes were bright with unshed tears. “Take me out of here, please, will you? I’ll commence to howl in another minute.”

“Of course,” Colin said quickly, and wondered if she remembered his name. When they were introduced there had been despair and bewilderment and incomprehension in her eyes. Ann Tucker—*little* Ann, he wanted to say, though she was tall as he. But that vision of a hurt child

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persisted. Already Colin was lost, though he didn't yet know it—a man is, when he starts applying the adjective “little” to a girl who stands fully five feet eight inches in her sheerest chiffon hose, and is addicted to three-inch heels.

Quietly, without farewells to the rest of the party, they left the roadhouse. Established in his car, Ann still was silent, and Colin found nothing to say. For perhaps fifteen minutes they drove through the still beauty of the night, before he glanced at her. She was crying, with a quiet desperation that racked her body.

“Oh, the devil,” Colin said under his breath, and swung the car off the road. He switched off the ignition, and without a word gathered her into an impersonal clasp. He was rather astonished at the difficulty of keeping it impersonal, that arose immediately he touched her. He felt momentarily indignant. What did she think he was, anyway? But he whipped out a clean handkerchief and tucked it into her hand, and said soothingly, “I know that into each life some rain must fall, but don't you think that's nearly enough April showers?”

Ann pulled a little away from him, and gulped, “I'm s-sorry,” her voice breaking on the final word.

His right arm still around her, Colin fished for his cigarette case with his left, and said, “Have a cigarette? They're said to be soothing. There's a point, you know, where tears cease to be sorrow and become hysterics.”

She accepted a cigarette and a light, and she stopped crying. They smoked together in silence for a few minutes, then Colin asked, not looking at her, “Okay?”

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"Okay," she said.

He started the car again. After a while Ann spoke. "You've been frightfully nice—and awfully understanding, to a strange girl with a smashed heart."

"My dear kid," said Colin, "I hope you won't think me callous when I say that that is one of the commoner ailments of mankind. Had it myself—it's not pretty, but one survives, quite satisfactorily."

"Quite unsatisfactorily, I would say," said Ann.

"I suppose it does seem that way to you now," Colin said musingly. "Ann—you don't mind my calling you Ann, do you?—as I was just in town for the wedding, I'll be off in the morning. I was wondering—may I write to you? I've been pretty sure, ever since I got that first letter from you, that you'd be a nice correspondent."

She was startled. "*My* letter to you? Who *are* you?"

"Colin Drake."

He sounded a little apologetic. So she hadn't known.

"Colin—*Drake!*" Ann gasped, then began to laugh, a little hysterically. "And I've been weeping in your arms all evening! Colin Drake! Oh, my gosh——"

"I'm sorry," Colin said. "I would have told you earlier—but after all, we were introduced. And I didn't think you cared much who I was, when you were using me merely as the nearest available exit. I was rather glad to leave the party—and very glad to leave it in your company. You were the only interesting thing about it, anyway——"

"And you really remembered me—I mean, you remem-

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bered my writing you that silly letter? How could you? You must hear from so many people ——”

“ My fan mail isn’t so heavy as all that,” Colin said rather drily. “ Of course I remember—it was flattering to know that my writing could tempt you to ‘ that particular form of adolescent insanity.’ ” Silently he blessed his prodigious memory that could conjure up a phrase from a fan letter received some years earlier. After all, he hadn’t known then that Ann would turn out to be the writer of it!

“ You do remember,” Ann said, rapturously. “ Nothing ever thrilled me so much as your nice answer,” she assured him.

A sardonic voice inside Colin’s head was saying, “ Nothing?” but he smiled at her and said, “ It looks like the beginning of a beautiful friendship, with admiration on all sides.”

They drove for a long while through the quiet night. Their conversation was undramatic, and unmomentous, but with every word Ann uttered, Colin found himself more entranced. Finally Ann said, “ I’d better go home. It’s very late.” She gave him brief directions on how to reach her house, and settled back in the corner of the seat. A sidewise glance told Colin that her eyes were steadily on his profile, and he wished briefly that it were a more classic one. Presently Ann said, “ This is it,” and Colin swung the car into the driveway, and they stopped in front of a big house, half screened from the road by trees—a gracious, rather old house, inviting in the silvery moonlight. Ann turned to him.

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"I don't know how to thank you—you've been rather well."

Colin said, "You might invite me in—I could get pneumonia in the night air, you know—all drenched with your tears ——"

"Oh, *do* come in," Ann said. "I'm sorry to have been so weepy. If I were you, I wouldn't have anything more to do with me ——" She opened a side door with her latchkey, and they entered a big, softly lighted room. It was the library, with bookshelves lining the walls, comfortable big old leather chairs, a massive desk, and a few low tables bearing lamps and odds and ends—cigarette boxes and matches and ashtrays and paper-cutters.

Ann touched a match to the fire laid ready in the fireplace, took off her jacket, and sank down in a big chair. "Please sit down," she said. "I'm suddenly a little in awe of you—and I haven't the faintest idea what I can talk to you about."

Colin sat down and smiled a little. "You were doing all right. Do I look so very formidable?" he inquired.

"I'm just remembering, with awful clarity, that you're my favorite author, and I have a responsibility for entertaining you—and I'm neither bright nor beautiful, and you'll probably be very bored."

"I hardly think so," he said. He took his battered silver cigarette case out of his pocket, and offered it to her. She was really beautiful, he thought. The firelight cast interesting shadows on her face, and her long eyelashes had dried in a series of little points. Neither her nose nor her eyes were

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tinged from weeping. She was an extraordinarily attractive girl.

It was amazing how easily they talked together. Quite cheerfully Ann explained her family's position among the new poor—well, two years new, anyway. Her father hadn't lost the family fortune until two years after everyone else went broke in the stock market crash. "Original of him, don't you think?" Ann said. She didn't really mind, except that it meant she just worked in an architect's office, instead of being an architect herself—and her sister's family lived with them, which cut down expenses some more. They ought to sell the house, of course, but the carnival across the lake had ruined the value of the Tucker estate. "I love having Connie and Davey and Betsy with us, of course—but it can't be much fun for them," Ann said reflectively. "Connie's really super—you'd love her."

"Is she like her sister?" Colin asked, smiling at Ann.

"We don't look alike," Ann said thoughtfully, "and I think she's quite a bit nicer——"

"I must meet her," Colin said emphatically. "How old are you, Ann?" he asked abruptly, offering up a silent prayer that she wasn't so young as he feared.

"Twenty-three."

Fifteen years. He wished irrationally that she weren't quite so young. If she were just two years older—twenty-five—the discrepancy in their ages wouldn't seem so great. He wondered if she classed him with her father. So he asked her, "Do you know how old I am?"

She regarded him gravely. "I don't know. You can't be

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so awfully young—you've been famous for too many years to be very young. But you don't seem old—middle thirties?" she guessed.

"Flattering me—both as to age and to fame. I'm thirty-eight," he said, and wondered how old Jock was. He had thought he looked very young, watching him at the wedding. Very young and very beautiful, with his tall blond head held high. Colin wished, for the second time that evening—and the second time in his life—for a more neatly assorted set of features. Always he had wished for a few more inches, but never quite so fervently as when he met this tall girl.

"That's not old," she said.

"I don't think so myself, most of the time," he admitted.

"If you'll give me your address, Ann, I'll be getting along ——"

"Write to me at the office," she said. "I need something to brighten up the place. These aren't the best times for architects, you know. I'm lucky to have a job."

"The job is lucky to have you," Colin said, making a note of the address. "It's been grand meeting you, Ann. Port Drake isn't very far from Seattle, after all. That's where I live—it's not big, but I feel proprietary about it. It's a lovely place—I want you to see it. But that can come later. In the meantime, you will answer my letters?"

"Of course!" Ann said. "Good-bye, Mr. Drake ——"

"Colin ——" he said.

"It sounds sort of fresh," she objected.

"I've been calling you Ann all evening," he pointed out.

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"Well—good-bye, Colin. Next time we meet, I promise not to dissolve in tears."

"I'll never make you cry," he said, quite seriously.

When Colin had gone, Ann lingered in the library long enough to smoke a final cigarette. "I didn't know there were any men like that," she said thoughtfully.

It wasn't until much later, after she was in bed and sleep was proving elusive, that she began to think of Jock again.

2

WHEN ANN CAME DOWN TO BREAKFAST, SHE FOUND HER sister and brother-in-law nearly finished, and regarding their two year old daughter with parental pride. "Hullo, Connie. Morning, Davey. Hi, brat." She leaned over Betsey, and regarded her face for a moment, looking for a clean place to kiss, gave up in despair and kissed her lightly on the top of her golden head.

"Ho, Ann," Betsey said, spitting out a bit of the toast she was gnawing on, along with the words.

Davey lit a cigarette, and got up. "Farewell, family. The old man has to go see a man about a dog ——"

"Gog for baby?" Betsey inquired hopefully.

"Certainly not," Connie said with decision. "You're too rough to have a dog. What would you do with a dog? Pull its ears and drag it around by the tail?"

"Oh, *dess!*" Betsey answered, in blissful contemplation.

Davey shook his head. "Poor dog. He'd be so unhappy—he'd just cry all the time ——"

"Oh, poo gog," his daughter said, with ready sympathy. "Poo, poo gog!" She looked ready to cry.

"Well, cheer up, snookums. You needn't feel sorry for

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him till you get him. G'-bye, sugar." He followed Ann's lead in kissing the top of Betsey's head, leaned over Connie and kissed her, said "Be seeing you, dolly," then patted Ann's shoulder as he passed her and murmured, "So long, kid."

There was sympathy in his brief touch, compassion in his voice. Useless for Ann to try to hide from her family the way she felt. She looked after Davey as he went out of the room. He looked rather like Jock—tall and blond and young and clean-looking. She and Connie had almost identical tastes. "He's a nice guy," she said.

"We like him," Connie answered carelessly. She flicked the toaster on, vanished into the kitchen and returned in a moment with a glass of orange juice in one hand, a steaming globe of coffee in the other. She set them down, picked up her offspring and said, "I'll join you for a cup of coffee as soon as I wash the infant's face and hands."

When she returned, Ann had lit a cigarette, and was sipping reflectively at a cup of coffee. "Have a smoke with your coffee, Connie—you have time," she urged her. "This is Sunday, and I ought to be able to help you a little. Where's Dad?"

"Playing golf. He started off at the crack of dawn, I guess. I found a note pinned to my door when I got up. I thought he'd eloped or something."

"Connie dear—our father?"

Connie lit a cigarette, and blew a neat smoke ring, to her infinite satisfaction. "You were late coming in, weren't you? I didn't hear you. We came straight home from the

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wedding. I didn't see you after the reception at all. What did you do?"

"Oh, I went on to a party. Sort of senseless. I guess I had a vague idea of getting tight or something equally dramatic, but I didn't, needless to say. I just distinguished myself by going on a crying jag in the arms of my favorite author."

"Ann!" Connie said.

"The crying jag was just tears—not liquor," Ann explained. "And said favorite author was very sweet and nice to me—I hope it wasn't just for copy, because he's rather a dear."

"Sorry to be dull, darling—but just who *is* your favorite author at the moment?"

"Oh, didn't you know? Colin Drake. He seemed sort of interested in me. Asked if he could write to me. Which is very thrilling, of course, but if he *is* interested, I wish he lived in town. I don't know just what I'm going to do in my spare time, Connie. What *does* a girl do when she has a broken heart?"

"Ann b'oke?" came Betsey's interested voice from the doorway. "Where?"

"It doesn't show, baby," Ann smiled at her. Connie escorted Betsey back outside into the sunshine, and when she returned Ann said, "But unfortunately I'm afraid it does. I've been wearing my heart on my sleeve for years, like an idiot."

Connie looked worried. "Ann, honey, I wish I could say something that would help—but there isn't anything. I can't even tell you that I never ~~liked~~ Jock anyway—

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though I'll admit I don't like him much *now*—because you know better.”

“Of course you like him,” Ann said ruefully. “I hope Nina will make him happy. I really do, you know. I want him to be happy, even if I'm not. And I'm not.”

“Tell me about Colin Drake, Ann,” Connie said. “How did you meet him? I had no idea he was a northwest author——”

“I guess he must know Nina's family. He came to the wedding and was in this party afterward. He just happened to be the closest man when I demanded to be taken away, and he obliged. He's awfully nice. He's thirty-eight, shorter than I, I'm afraid—but of course I was wearing high heels—and awfully dark. Black hair and blue eyes—and sort of a bluish look about his jaws—you know. One of the reasons I've always liked blond men best. He's not a bit good looking—very beaky nose, thin and sort of long—his nose, I mean—and with a sort of lean and hungry look about him. He has a nice voice—mellow and very low.”

“Is he married?” Connie inquired.

Ann looked startled. “I don't know,” she confessed. “I don't think he could be——”

“It might be just as well if you found out,” Connie commented.

“I see what you mean,” Ann agreed. “But you know, it might be rather interesting to have a man like that around. Do you realize that I've never even gone out with anybody but Jock? It was undoubtedly a great mistake to let him save my life when I was fifteen—when somebody saves your

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life, it sort of gives them a claim on it, you know." Ann was desperately trying to make herself believe it.

"Well—I'm glad *somebody* kept you from drowning," Connie said drily. "I sort of like you, you know."

She briskly began to clear the table, and Ann got up to help her. Connie was such a cute little girl, Ann thought. She frequently said that Connie had had sense enough to stop growing at a reasonable size. She wished that she had stopped shooting up some four inches short of her present height. She had never minded being tall, because it didn't matter with Jock's six foot three alongside her. There always had been Jock, and now there never would be again.

As she watched Connie briskly whisking up suds in the dishpan, she thought for the thousandth time that Connie looked ridiculously young. No one would ever suspect that she was thirty. Though she wore her honey-colored hair in a knot on her neck in an absurd attempt to look matronly, she might almost have been seven years younger than Ann, instead of that much older. She had a vast enthusiasm for life, and nothing ever dismayed her. When their father lost his money, it was Connie who had competently arranged matters for their two households to combine. If she ever found it somewhat unsatisfactory, no one suspected it for a moment. It was simply the thing to do, and Connie matter-of-factly went about doing it. Connie's eyes met Ann's over the steaming pan of rinse water, and she burst out passionately, "Oh, *damn* Jock Hamilton!"

"Connie," Ann said soberly, "do you think I'll ever get over it?"

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"Of course you will!" Connie said. "Such nonsense! There are millions of other men, and after all, Jock is only one man who happens to be too darned handsome, with a nice plausible manner and a heluva lot of charm. I'll admit all that—but he's behaved rottenly to you, Ann."

"I don't know," Ann said slowly. "He never broke any promises—he never made any. I just took too much for granted, I suppose. It's just—well, my father doesn't happen to be an eminent and successful lawyer, who can use a nice bright young man with lots of brains but no experience in his firm. Just one of those tough breaks. Oh, I'm being bitter about it, and I haven't any excuse—I'm giving Jock a lot of nice discreditable reasons for doing what he did, because I'm too conceited to admit that he could possibly find some other girl more attractive than I."

"Nina isn't nearly so attractive as you, Ann."

"Sisterly blindness," Ann smiled at her. "Young Mrs. Jock Hamilton is one of our most attractive matrons—she's very beautiful, and was one of the most sought-after debs of the season. It speaks well for Jock's charm of person that he made the grade—after all, Jock doesn't have a dime, you know. What if I had married him? If he'd asked me, you understand. Why, I probably would have had to go on working for the next forty years, just to keep the wolf from the door. Oh, it wouldn't have been pleasant at all . . . but, oh, Connie, it would have been *fun*!" Blinded by sudden tears, she ran stumbling from the room, up the stairs to her bedroom, and flung herself on the bed. Incredible that one could be so badly hurt, and still go on

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living. Would there always be this sharp pain, tearing at her heart? It was very sharp and very real, an actual physical pain in her breast.

Ann didn't dwell on it very much, but she wondered sometimes, fleetingly, if she would have lost Jock if they had had an affair. They had discussed it—but not until long after their first kiss had revealed blindingly the depth of their emotion. Jock hadn't even intended that first kiss—it had been almost accidental, and he had groaned despairingly, "I'd sworn I wouldn't fall in love," but Ann hadn't paid very much attention to that. Not then, anyway. Their discussions had been carefully dispassionate, rather academic—sitting carefully apart, not touching. Jock had been mildly funny about it—"I want you, baby, but I'm scared of your big brother," and "A shotgun wouldn't make me a damn bit more solvent, you know,"—and, more seriously, "Honey, you aren't the kind of girl a guy can have an affair with—it would matter too much."

She wiped her eyes, and still sniffing a little, reached for a book on the table beside her bed. *Though This Be Madness* by Colin Drake. Pleasant, informal, unimportant essays. She read a few pages, here and there. He did write beautifully, and brought interest to the smallest details of life. Sheer charm exuded from every line. He would be a nice man to know. She wondered if he really would write to her. It had seemed quite plausible last night, but sort of incredible by daylight.

But it seemed that he had meant it. Every day, when she opened the mail at the office, there was a fat letter from

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Colin. He wrote charming letters, and Ann felt somehow guilty that they were wasted on a public of one. She wrote him three times a week, and although just at first her letters were a little stilted from awe, as she gradually began to feel that she knew him rather better than anyone else in the world, her letters became a faithful expression of Ann herself. Colin expressed delight with Ann's letters—which released further any inhibitions she might have felt. Ann knew how Colin felt about almost everything—and had an occasional uneasy feeling that he certainly knew *her* mind inside and out.

Ann showed Connie the letter in which Colin told her of the crack-up of his marriage, some years before, in which he commented that perhaps it was some inadequacy of his own, some glaring fault that he was too conceited to see, that made a failure of his more intimate relationships. Ann didn't believe that, of course. Perhaps she wasn't meant to. Quickly she placed the blame on the woman involved. For very often, she had noticed, the most intelligent men showed the least brains in picking their women. Probably, she thought wryly, that's why he liked *me*. She said as much to Connie. Connie's comment was brief. "The man's clever," she said.

3

WHEN ANN LOST HER JOB—OR, RATHER, QUIT IT IN A melodramatic moment, her hand still stinging from violent contact with the startled though inebriated face of her employer—it was Colin who came to the rescue, with the proposal that Ann build a house for him. In that year of depression, such a prompt offer of a job was almost miraculous—and when it was the ultimate in dream jobs, as it was, it was unheard of. Ann was grateful—so grateful that she presented Colin with the plans for the house that she had been dreaming over and improving ever since she started studying architecture—the home she was to build some day. Connie was surprised, but on the whole approving. She liked Colin instantly, at their first meeting, and looked him over with a speculative eye. Like most happily married women, Connie was an instinctive matchmaker. Colin was a little old for Ann, of course, but Connie approved of older men. She would have married one herself, if she hadn't happened to fall in love with Davey, who was her own age.

In the long drive north to Port Drake, Ann renewed her acquaintance with Colin as a man. The easy intimacy of

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their letters was gone, and she felt strangely shy with him. It was rather absurd that this man, who had had voluntary access to most of her thoughts for nearly two months, should seem a stranger now that he was beside her.

Then he turned to her, smiling a little. "Are you pondering the results of the uncertain process of letter-writing, Ann?" he asked. He had a nice smile, inviting her confidence.

"I'm wondering a little," she confessed, "where I got the idea that I know you rather better than anyone else in the world. I did think that, you know—until I saw you again. And now I realize that I don't really know you at all."

"Oh, I don't know," Colin said. "I think you do, really. Surely I've managed to convey something of myself in all those words I've flung in your direction. Of course, needless to say I've probably made out a better case for myself than if I'd left it to your own observation—that's my business!"

Ann laughed at him.

"Don't be modest," she begged, "I can't bear it. I can't tell you how much I've enjoyed your letters. It's made me feel so important to learn so much about how your mind works—or I think I have," she ended, suddenly unsure of herself.

"Of course," Colin said. "You're undoubtedly the number one authority in the world today on the working of Colin Drake's mind—such as it is! Look, Ann—need we be so polite? Think back on all the things you've told me—

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why I undoubtedly know more about you than your best friend. Remember me?"

It worked. They exchanged grins, and dropped all formality. Ann discovered that not only was Colin interesting, he was fun. It was a greater tribute.

They reached Port Drake in time for lunch. It was a nice, clean-looking town, clustered cosily around the harbor. They drove through the town, and up a hill to an imposing great house, overlooking the Sound. "Is this your house?" Ann asked.

Colin nodded, casually proprietary.

"But—but—why do you want to build one, then?" she asked.

He grinned at her. "After all, Ann—look at the size of it. We have most of it shut up—use only a half dozen rooms. It's ridiculous to continue ——"

Ann nodded. "But it's a nice house," she said. "What will you do with it, after you have another?"

"Children's Home," Colin said briefly. "It was extraordinarily blind of me not to see the necessity for it before."

Ann was even more impressed by the inside of the house. It was lovely outside, a big English house set into the green hills, gracious and right in its setting, but the calm beauty of the enormous living room, with high beamed ceiling, huge stone fireplace, and old, mellow-looking furniture, caught at her heart. "Colin, how *can* you give this up?"

"I've always wanted to build a house for myself, somehow. This is nice, I'll admit. But it's just a house. I had a happy boyhood here, and it's a grand house for kids. The

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present orphanage isn't adequate, nearly. With this house they can have at least the outward semblance of a normal life."

Ann wandered over to the fireplace, and stood there, looking up at the portrait that hung above it. It was of a lovely girl, with golden curls and great grey eyes, a dimple in her soft round chin. "Who is she?" Ann asked.

Colin came and stood beside her. "My great-grandmother," he said. "I love that picture—you'll have to ~~have~~ have a special place for it in my new house. It's a Raeburn, you know—and the only thing that my father got from England. She was a great person, Margaret Duncan. She lived to be ninety, and before she died, with her own hands she wrote the address on the crated picture that was her sign of forgiveness to her grandson, Michael Drake, exiled in disgrace from the land of his birth—and doing right well in the land of his adoption, I might add. It was five years before I was born that my father received that picture—and faint sounds of the family wrath were still echoing in my earliest memory."

"Why was your father exiled in disgrace, Colin?" Ann asked. She loved the romantic sound of it. It was like something out of a book.

"I never knew exactly," Colin admitted, "but I haven't a doubt that he deserved it. From what I know of his activities here, anyway. He was an old pirate, when I knew him, and pirates don't usually spring into being full-fledged."

Ann was a little shocked, and it showed on her face. "Why, Colin ——" she protested.

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"Oh, he was a pirate on a big scale," Colin assured her, "and if the scale is big enough, you're always forgiven for it—admired for it, even. He robbed the land, but more than that he robbed the other pirates, and nobody feels especially sorry for them, you know. And robbing the land was just a case of getting there first—if he hadn't, somebody else would have. So it's all quite respectable, in time."

"Did the rest of the family ever forgive him?" Ann asked.

"I don't know, really. I can remember his sending them money—sort of a reversal of the usual remittance man idea—after the war. It must have hurt them horribly to accept it, but they had to. They're all gone, now. Four of my cousins were killed in action, and a fifth died in a flu epidemic while she was nursing in a London hospital. Poor child, she was only nineteen. My father and mother, my uncles and aunts, are all dead now. I'm the only surviving Drake of our family. Not enemy bullets, a German prison camp, nor those incredibly unsafe wartime airplanes were sufficient to kill me off." Colin grinned, and changed the subject abruptly. "Aren't you hungry? How about some lunch?"

Ann was terrified by Colin's housekeeper, Mrs. Christmas. She was a small, grim, indomitable old lady, whose faded blue eyes regarded the world with distrust and suspicion through steel-rimmed spectacles. Ann felt distinctly in awe of her. "I feel rather like a trespasser who's shortly to be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law," she confided to Colin, in one of Mrs. Christmas' absences from the room.

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"She believes everyone guilty until proven innocent," Colin grinned.

"She's a wonderful cook," Ann said, in some appreciation. The remark was fortunately timed. Mrs. Christmas was bringing in dessert, a miracle of sweetness and light in the form of an apricot souffle. Her mouth twitched a little as Ann watched her, and desperately trying to follow up what seemed a happy remark, she added, "Before my father lost his money, we had a cook who was almost as good as you, Mrs. Christmas. We always thought she was the best in the world. It just shows what wrong conclusions one can reach by not getting around enough."

"I'm glad to see young girls eat," Mrs. Christmas answered shortly, and left the room.

"And you can thank your healthy appetite for having her on your side from now on," Colin informed Ann.

As they left the house together, Colin asked her, "Would you like to walk? It isn't far."

Ann nodded, and plunged her hands into the pockets of her tweed jacket, and strode along beside him up the country road. She had left her hat at the house, and the sun was warm on her bare head. A cool breeze blew from off the Sound, and the water was bright and blue beneath the summer sky. They walked along a path at the edge of a cliff overlooking the water. Across a wide expanse of the Sound, the Olympics, traces of snow crowning their rugged heads, stood proud and majestic against the sky. Ann sighed a little, in pure contentment. "Oh, it's lovely here, Colin. I'd like to stay here forever."

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"Will you?" he asked politely.

She grinned. "Off and on while I'm building your house," she assured him.

They rounded a curve in the path, and Colin said, "This is it, Ann."

"Um," she answered musingly. "Nice." There was a cleared space, at the top of the cliff, ringed about by trees. The bay curved in, just there, and on either hand great groves of evergreens swept down to the water. Ann sat down on the grass, warm and dry in the sun, and took a cigarette thoughtfully from the paper pack in her pocket. She leaned over a little, while Colin held his lighter for her, and said, "I'm going to have to get busy, to have the house far enough along before the rainy season starts. We should at least have it plastered by then, or there'll be trouble. Is there a contractor in Port Drake, Colin?"

"Charlie Hansen builds things—he's competent enough, but you'll have to watch him—I've heard that he's likely to get independent ideas."

They discussed ways and means for a while, and Ann expressed a haunting worry that Colin was taking an awful chance on her comparative inexperience.

Colin stretched lazily on his back, squinting against the sun. He gripped his hands in the grass about his head. It was tough and resilient, and gave him a good hold. "It doesn't matter, Ann. You know my book, *Bruce of Scotland?*"

"Of course," Ann said. "I know all your books—practically by heart." Although it was a silly and conceited thing

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to say—*Bruce* was an extremely scholarly book, and if anyone else had written it, Ann would have considered it over her head and avoided it carefully.

“Well—the movies bought that for fifty thousand dollars—apparently under the impression (which I trust is mistaken) that it’s fiction. As that was in the nature of money found in the street, I can squander it with a clear conscience.”

Ann looked down at him appraisingly. She liked his face, despite its lack of conventional regularity. It was a strong face, and a very kind one.

He squinted at her, and said softly, “My face is unfortunate, I’ll admit, but I have a be-yoo-tiful disposition!”

Ann’s face crinkled with laughter. “I was just thinking what a nice face it was. A nice, English face. I’m glad you’re English, Colin. I’ve always liked Englishmen.”

Colin sat up in violent protest. “It’s a lie!” he half shouted. “I’m American. I’m not English at all.”

Ann shook her head. “Oh, you’re English enough,” she insisted.

“Now look, Ann—be reasonable. I’ll admit my father was English, and I’m afraid I talk like him. But accents are catching, and it might just as easily be Swedish, considering the preponderant nationality in Port Drake!”

“Idiot!” Ann said. “Well, we won’t fight about it. Listen, Colin—I’d better get back to the house and start my mathematical calculations. There are quantities of things I have to figure on before I can start consulting workmen. I wonder if I can talk Dad into letting me have the car to

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drive back and forth in? That'll mean he'll have to take the bus to and from the University—he's been teaching Oriental Literature classes there almost ever since we became so broke—but maybe he won't mind."

Colin got to his feet, and gave Ann a hand up. "Well, I was wondering, Ann—wouldn't it be better if you stayed here? I'll want to buy all the building materials through dealers here—and local workmen, of course—and it seems that it would be less complicated all around if you were living in town. That reminds me, I haven't said anything about paying you. What is the usual arrangement—a percentage? We'll work that out. And of course you'll live at my house while you're working on it——"

"But Colin ——" Ann said hesitatingly.

"Um?"

"What will people say? I mean, the townspeople. Won't they talk if I stay at your house? I mean, even with Mrs. Christmas there and everything?" She was a little embarrassed at voicing it, but she was thinking of him more than of herself. After all, it was his town.

"Yes, I'd thought of that," Colin said, "but I'm going to New York, so everything will be quite proper. Mrs. Christmas will take good care of you, and you can stay up here all week and go home week-ends." He looked at his watch. "It's too late to do it today, but I'll take you to the bank the next time you're up and arrange a checking account for you, and authorize requisitions on the Drake Lumber Company ——"

Back at the house, Ann went to work in the library, and

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accomplished a lot. Later they had tea. On a low table in front of the davenport, there were hot buttered scones beneath a silver cover, and orange marmalade, and a steaming silver teapot and a larger one with hot water. Ann bounced with pleasure as she sat down. "You *are* English, you see!" she exulted. "No American man would serve afternoon tea. And do I love it!"

She was a little more doubtful, though, when she had tasted the marmalade. "Yes, you are English," she murmured, regretfully this time. "My Anglomania has never extended to enjoying the bitter goo that passes for orange marmalade to the peculiar English taste." As it turned out, that was fortunate too. Mrs. Christmas eyed her with new favor, as she brought her orange marmalade from her own personal jar. Thirty years of looking after the Drakes had not changed Mrs. Christmas' hearty American tastes. She congratulated Ann on having the courage of her convictions. "Most young women pretend they like that stuff, whether they do or not," she said. She made a few other remarks, rather disparaging. Colin helped himself to some more tea, and said resignedly, "I suppose it's a great mistake to let you live here with that woman. You're going to have a complete—I might almost say exhaustive—catalogue of my bad habits, before you're done. And she won't say a word about the good ones—she won't even mention them. I have a few, too."

"You amaze me," Ann said softly. She accepted a cigarette, and curled up in a corner of the davenport. "You know, Colin, you're going to have a perfectly beautiful

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house. Modified modern, I think—I don't dare go in for anything else, when you have this lovely place to compare it with. Would you like that?"

"Glass and chromium?" Colin asked guardedly.

"Of course not, silly. I can't imagine you in a glass and chromium setting . . . you know, that's a smallish house I've planned. Its principle, though, is that it may be added on and on to—ells and wings and all sorts of things, if you need expansion. At present it has only one bedroom. That doesn't leave any room for your housekeeper, so I suppose I'd better change it."

Colin shook his head. "Leave it," he said. "Figure it as a house for two people who're fond of each other—and room for expansion later."

Ann felt a twinge of disappointment. Perhaps that was why Colin was going to New York. Probably he was planning on marrying again. She didn't want him to marry. He was so extremely satisfactory the way he was.

It was early evening when they started back toward Seattle. "We'll stop for dinner on the way," Colin said.

"I'm certainly not hungry yet," Ann murmured. "I'm not used to afternoon tea." She turned a little in the seat, and put her file of papers in back, with her hat on top to weight it down. A lizard that had crawled up on the back of the seat to bask in the sun, startled, ran over her hand. Ann gave a little shriek, and flung her arms around Colin's neck. She clung to him a moment, trembling a little. "It's still in the car," she said. "Can you get it out, Colin?"

Colin slid out, and pulled her into the driver's seat.

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Then he went around, picked the frightened little beast up, and set it gently down in the rock border along the driveway. "They're harmless, you know," he said.

Ann, ashamed of herself, slid back into her corner as he got into the car. "I'm sorry," she said, "I didn't mean to fly at you like that—but it startled me so. I'm scared to death of things that crawl, and things that fly around and get in my hair ——"

"The things that crawl and the things that bite, are unreliable things," Colin quoted. "It was all right, Ann. I rather liked it."

They stopped at a roadside inn, more than halfway to Seattle. Ann felt very peaceful, sitting quietly in the corner of a booth, listening to Colin's skilful ordering of dinner. She wasn't particularly hungry, but she liked Colin's competent way of doing things. He puzzled her a little, though. She couldn't quite make out his motive in being so nice to her. He must have a motive of some sort. Sophisticated men of the world—which Colin was, despite his residence in little Port Drake—didn't put themselves out to such an extent without a motive of some sort, creditable or otherwise. Looking at him, she felt assured of its being creditable. But what it was still remained enigmatic.

She smiled at him across the table, then glanced at the other side of the room, and suddenly her heart was in her throat and beating there so hard she thought she would suffocate. Her hands felt weak, and she dropped them into her lap to hide their trembling. Colin looked at her a

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moment, puzzled, then followed her eyes and saw Jock and Nina sitting at a table across from them.

"My choice of inn wasn't so good, was it?" Colin said. "I'm sorry, Ann."

"It's all right," Ann said. "It was just—unexpected."

"Do we go all over cordial and invite them to join us? Or do we just not see them?"

"Neither," Ann said. "We'll speak to them if they should see us, of course—I'll stick my chin out and invite someone to sock it."

She was very quiet throughout dinner. She ate little, playing with her food, listening to Colin politely, and making noncommittal answers. Jock didn't see them until he had risen from the table. He saw them then, and spoke briefly to Nina, then hurried over toward them. "Hullo, Ann. How are you? How do you do, sir," to Colin, which Ann thought a trifle impudent. Colin wasn't so old as to demand a "sir" from Jock.

Nina came up then and said, "Hullo, Ann. And Colin. Why how nice—I didn't know you two knew each other."

"Neither did I," Jock added.

"We're very old and very intimate friends," Colin answered gravely. "When did you get back in town?"

"Just yesterday," Nina answered.

Ann smiled at her tentatively, and wondered if Nina knew how long and close had been her friendship with Jock. Nina was looking lovely, her face glowing with happiness. The blue-black sheen of her hair showed to beautiful advantage in a new hair-dress, parted in the middle, and

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brought down very smooth and straight to a long roll across the back of her head. It was a trying style that only someone with Nina's clear skin and chiseled regularity of feature would dare to attempt. Ann admitted grudgingly that the Hamiltons were an extraordinarily handsome young couple.

When they had gone, after exchanging a few more commonplaces, she felt distinct relief. Colin reached across the table and held her hand briefly. "Good girl, Ann," he said approvingly.

"Well, after all, I'm civilized," Ann said rather bitterly.

Colin eyed her a moment.

"Oh, quite," he said.

They talked little during the rest of the drive back to Seattle. Colin parked his car in front of the house, and together they walked around to the library door. As they passed the side veranda, a tall figure reared up out of the shadows, and a deep masculine voice said uncertainly, "Ann?"

"Alan!" Ann cried, and running up the steps flung herself into his arms. "Oh Alan, Alan darling, I'm so glad to see you! Why didn't you let us know you were coming?"

"Well, you know how I am about writing letters," he said apologetically.

Colin's voice came then, from behind Ann. "Do you have these spells often?" he asked politely.

Still clinging to Alan's arm, Ann turned to face him. "You mean this little habit of throwing myself on the nearest man's neck? Not very often, Colin, really. Anyway, this is my brother. Alan, I want you to know Colin Drake—

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so far as I can tell," she added confidentially, "he's the nicest man I know."

"How things do change while I'm away," Alan said pleasantly. "For the last eight years, to the best of my knowledge, on one has so much as threatened to take that title away from Jock Hamilton. I'll be glad to see you in the light, Drake. You must be quite a fellow——"

"Alan," Ann said in a funny voice, "haven't you heard about Jock?"

"Haven't I—— Good Lord, Ann, what's happened? What's wrong with Jock?"

"He's married," Ann said, in such a tragic voice that it struck her suddenly as very funny. She laughed a little hysterically. "Oh, yes, Alan, Jock is very much married. Fascinating wife he has—she was Nina Greenwood, remember her? Perfectly stunning couple they make. My gracious, haven't you had *any* mail from home?"

"Not for three months," he answered. "Let's go inside. I've been parked out on this porch for hours. Has every member of our family suddenly gone deaf? I've rung the doorbell for fifteen minutes at a time, and I couldn't raise a soul."

"You might have tried throwing things at the windows," Ann suggested. "The doorbell's out of order, and you can't hear the knocker upstairs. Didn't you have a key?"

"Lost it," Alan answered briefly.

Ann pulled out her own key, and unlocked the library door. She went inside, and switched on lights here and there, then settled down in a big leather chair and reached for a

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cigarette. "Sit down, Colin," she said absently, her eyes on Alan. "Darling, you have no idea how good it is to see you. Will you be here for a while? I've got so much to tell you!"

"I'll be here ten days—unless that longshoreman's strike actually starts. That might delay sailing a while."

"Alan is first officer on a freighter," Ann said to Colin, and watched her brother with admiring eyes, as he moved about the room. "Looking for something?"

"I'd like a drink," Alan said.

"Smart lad, aren't you? You might try the kitchen," Ann suggested. Then she relented, and said, "Sit down, Alan—I'll bring you drinks. Talk to Colin and amuse him. I'm afraid that a whole day of my childish prattle has probably gotten him down somewhat. You might elevate his opinion of the family intelligence with a few well-chosen sentences ——"

A few minutes later Ann came back with a tray bearing glasses, a bowl of ice cubes, a couple of bottles and a siphon. "You mix 'em," she suggested to Alan.

She watched her brother with some pride. He was a large and handsome man, very tall and broad-shouldered, and very lean and tanned, with his teeth showing remarkably white in an occasional grin. Alan was thirty-six years old, but he looked many years younger than Colin. But that, Ann reflected, was what Colin got for being so dark. It was that bluishness of closely shaven chin and jowl that added years to Colin's age.

As Ann accepted from Alan a tall glass in which ice clinked pleasantly (it was only ginger-ale, which Ann made

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a habit of drinking, to look sociable), a sleepy voice from the hall inquired, "Don't tell me that's Alan I hear?" and Connie, her hair in two fetching braids over her shoulders, and wearing a really elegant negligee came into the library, blinking a little. Suddenly she saw Colin, and turned abruptly, colliding with Davey, in dressing-gown and pajamas, his curly blond hair ruffled, as he followed her closely. "It's Alan," she whispered urgently, "but there's company too. We'd better go back upstairs, Davey."

Colin chuckled. "Come on in, Mrs. Hoffman," he said. "I really don't mind, and I think anyway I'd better leave what is obviously a family party."

"Don't leave," Connie said politely. "We shouldn't have come bursting in like this, but we thought we heard Alan and we were so anxious to see him . . ." Her voice trailed off into a little squeal, as Alan strode forward and swept her off her feet with one competent arm.

"Hullo, Sis!" he said. "Hi, Davey!" over her shoulder.

Colin got up and walked toward the door. Ann followed him, and he said, "I think my absence would be more appreciated than my presence, just now."

"I hate to have you rush off like this," Ann said.

"Mr. Drake," Connie called, "the gentleman in back of me is my husband."

Colin waved a salute with one hand. "You have no idea how you relieve my mind," he said solemnly.

"We'll be clothed and in our right minds the next time you come," Connie promised.

"All right," Colin said. "It'll be tomorrow, so I'll expect

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it." Then to Ann he said, "I'm staying in town overnight. I'll be out here first thing in the morning and we'll drive back to Port Drake and get everything settled. You'd better tell your family about what our plans are, and get their approval."

"Well really, Colin," Ann said, a little annoyed, "I'm of age, you know. They don't tell me what to do."

"Good night, Ann," he grinned at her. He called good night to the others, and left. Ann shut the door after him, and faced her family once more. And faced quite an inquisition along with it.

"Who's the guy?" Alan demanded.

"Do you realize that you've been with him for fourteen hours?" Connie asked.

"Are his intentions honorable?" Davey added delicately.

Ann sat down, and deliberately lit a cigarette. "In due order," she said casually, "the guy is Colin Drake. I realize quite well how long I've been with him—and it's been very nice, too. He's my new boss, Davey, and if I were you I wouldn't worry about his intentions. He hasn't any, so far as I can find out. Which may, or may not, be a break," she concluded thoughtfully.

Colin, driving downtown to his club, felt ridiculously young and elated. He felt a little drunk, which wasn't possible on the two drinks he had had with Alan, but never had his mind been more active. Once he said aloud, rather

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savagely, "Who you think you are—Eugene O'Neill?" but the mental dialogue went on in his head.

What are you feeling so good about, Drake? Think you made an impression, do you?

She's a grand girl. I'm going to marry her.

That's what you think. She's still in love with that boy. What you going to do—catch her on the rebound? Think that will work?

I'll make her forget he ever existed ——

How? By the contrast? Because he's tall and you're not, and he's handsome and you're homely, and he's young and you're not so young?

And he's poor, and I'm rich.

Do you think that would make any difference to Ann?

No, but, after all, he's married. I could give her a nice life. I would, too. I've never felt like this before. I knew it the first time I saw her ——

Remember Diana? That was thunder and lightning and explosions when you met ——

I never wanted to marry Diana.

No. You thought marriage was a washout. Trying to blame the institution for your own inadequacies. And how long did Diana last? How long did it take you to find out that you didn't even like each other very well ——

That was physical attraction. We were both adult. We knew what we were doing, and if it didn't work out, nobody was hurt ——

What do you think this is? Believing in love at first sight now, are you?

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Well, who ever loved who loved not at first sight?

Hah—quoting Marlowe as an authority? His record was considerably worse than yours —

I like this girl, too. I want to spend the rest of my life with her —

You're fifteen years older than she is. How long do you think the glamor would last for her?

It won't do my cause any harm that she thinks I'm a celebrity. I'm not, of course, but if I am to her, that's just as good —

Yah—a celebrity. Question: What is rarer than a Colin Drake first edition? Answer: A Colin Drake second edition —

I'd be good to her. She wouldn't regret marrying me —

You were good to Millicent, weren't you? And she regretted marrying you—practically all the time. You never made her happy, and you weren't happy yourself —

Millicent and I just didn't click. It wasn't either her fault or mine. We just shouldn't have married. We would have been good friends —

Well, you knew her well enough, didn't you? You'd known her all your life. What makes you think you're a better judge now?

Hell, I was twenty-two years old. I was going away to war. It seemed like a good idea—maybe I wouldn't come back. It was excitement and fever and madness —

Excitement and fever and madness about a girl you'd known all your life. So now it's excitement and fever and

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madness about a girl you've seen twice. You're a fool, Drake. You'll never learn.

"Oh, shut up!" Colin Drake yelled at Colin Drake, and then laughed aloud. Life was grand, and Ann was a miracle. He would continue his wooing as he had begun it—at last he was willing to admit to himself that wooing it was, and wooing it had been from the beginning—behind his typewriter he could be bold as any Lochinvar. His words had charmed her, she confessed, when they were just addressed to the general public. Would she be able to resist a continued barrage aimed at her? Oh, he'd be subtle, no end—he wouldn't so much as hint at romance. He'd give her cracked heart time to heal. There was plenty of time. What if he *was* thirty-eight? He'd never felt so young in his life, and a year would add much maturity to Ann —

Colin began to sing, loudly and not very well. His ear was excellent, but his voice was not, so he seldom sang, but tonight his heart sang with him, and the song fell less harshly on his sensitive ear. He and the universe were in tune.

4

ANN OPENED ONE EYE, AND REGARDED CONNIE DARKLY. "I," she announced, "am too old to go out with college boys."

Connie nodded serenely and agreed. "That's what I thought last night. And of course you're much too young to go out with those wolves Davey keeps bringing home. I asked him didn't he know any nice men, and he said indignantly that of course he did, but all his best friends were married."

Ann climbed out of bed, and tottered over to the dressing table. She picked up a comb and listlessly ran it through her hair, regarding herself sardonically in the mirror. "All *my* best friends are too, that's the trouble," she said. Then she went on broodingly, "College boys, especially sophomores—I should have known better—go too many places, and eat too many strange things at strange hours of the night——"

"And drink strange things?" Connie inquired idly.

"This isn't a hangover," Ann said. "These lads were the talking variety—they got drunk on words. And such words—Connie, I don't understand the younger generation," she ended sadly.

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"That's too bad," Connie said sympathetically.

"It is, isn't it? Especially as they seem to be my only alternative. To wolf-culture, I mean. Which is difficult, as long as you feel I have to be chaperoned within an inch of my life with them!"

"It isn't that I don't trust you, lamb," Connie protested, "but honestly ——"

"I wasn't objecting," Ann said mildly. "Another thing I'm not young enough for is the belief that wolves are necessarily interesting."

"Why don't you accept Taffy's invitation and go to Hollywood when you finish the house?" Connie said. "I mean, you can afford the trip now, can't you?"

"I'm positively feelthy rich," Ann agreed. "I suggested to Colin that he should at least deduct my board from my fee, and all his hospitable instincts were outraged. It seems that a Drake wouldn't think of having a paying guest!"

"Of course," Connie said tentatively, "when Colin comes back ——"

"He'll live in Port Drake, and I'll live in Seattle, and we'll continue our charming correspondence and I still won't have anything to do on Saturday nights! And from what I hear I probably won't even be able to find a job—despite Davey's interesting theory that there's always a good job for someone with exceptional ability. I'm not that exceptional."

"You know what I think?" Connie said.

"No, what?"

"You need some breakfast."

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Finishing her second cup of coffee, Ann leaned back and said to Connie, "It's a horribly mundane theory, but perhaps there's something to it—anyway, I'm much more human after coffee than before."

"Who isn't?" Connie said. "Why don't you go outside and talk to the infant? She talks about you all week long—she really misses you an awful lot, you know."

"I miss her," Ann responded. "She's a remarkable child, don't you think? I don't care much for kids, usually."

"For a nice unprejudiced opinion, always go to the infant's mother," Connie said. "Don't *ever* say things like that to me, Ann—I get boring on the subject far too easily."

Ann found Betsey playing in her sandbox, crooning happily to herself. "Ho, Ann," she said. "Hi!"

"I'm fine, thanks—and you?"

"Bekkus," Betsey said, offering Ann a revolting looking tin dishful of mud.

"Thanks, I've just had some," Ann said. "I thought you weren't allowed to play with water."

"Mik," Betsey contradicted her. "*Muss* and mik," she added.

"Very muss," Ann agreed, "but it's still wet." She didn't press the point, however, but regarded Betsey fondly. She was such a beautiful child—and so bright. "Hiya, sugar-plum," she said, "who do you love?" She said it complacently. The answer was almost automatic—"You!" with Betsey's most charming grin.

"Zock," Betsey answered, unexpectedly.

"*What?*"

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"Wuv Zock," Betsey repeated obligingly.

"Hey," Ann said, walking into it, "you don't love Jock more than *me*, do you?"

"Yup," Betsey said, and turned her back.

"Aren't you starting a little young?" Ann asked, but Betsey ignored her. She was busy. Ann got up from her knees, and started back toward the house.

"Where goin'?" Betsey called after her.

"I'm going to talk to Connie," Ann answered. "*She* doesn't love Jock more than me."

"Bye," Betsey said cheerfully.

Ann told Connie about it, who laughed. "Don't feel bad—Betsey's frequently told me that she likes Davey's mother lots better than me, and thinks she'll go live with her—but she hasn't moved yet."

"Now look," Ann protested, "Betsey's a phenomenal child, but you can't expect me to believe that she can say all that—she doesn't know enough words."

"She gets her ideas across, though," Connie said, smiling.

"Doesn't she just," Ann said, a little grimly. "Has she seen Jock lately?"

"He's been by a couple of times to see her—he likes her, I guess."

"Did he ask about me?"

"Oh, he sent his regards—I didn't think you were especially interested in his regards, so guess I forgot to tell you."

"I'm not," Ann said slowly, "not in his *regards*. But if

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Jock should so much as crook his little finger in my direction you know what I'd do, don't you?"

"No you wouldn't, Ann," Connie said positively.

"It would be nice to have your touching faith in me," Ann commented a little bitterly.

Later in the day Ann told Connie that she thought she'd accept Taffy's invitation. "It might be well for me to be out of the reach of Jock's—little finger," she said slowly. "In case he should happen to feel like crooking it——"

Ann came into the gloom of the big house, from the spring sunshine. "Mrs. Christmas," she called.

"Here I am, child," Mrs. Christmas answered, hurrying down the hall.

"I just came from the post office. I have a letter from Colin—he'll be home next week. And I've got cold feet. Do you think he'll like the house?"

Mrs. Christmas patted her reassuringly. "Of course he will, child. Mr. Colin's always been nice—so long as he got his own way. You must have convinced him you were pretty smart, for him to go off that way and leave you to build and furnish his house. He generally don't have so much confidence in other people."

Ann sat down on a footstool, and hugged her knees. "I don't know why he has confidence in me—he doesn't like people very much, usually, does he? In all the letters I've had from him this past winter, he's told me all about so many people, and none of them have been nice. I wrote

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him once and asked him if he didn't know *any* nice people, and he wrote back and told me that my trouble was seeing the people I liked surrounded by a haze of glamor, and he saw them the way they really were. I sometimes wonder what he really thinks of *me*, beneath that cordial and charming manner."

"Huh! I wouldn't worry, if I was you," Mrs. Christmas said brusquely. "He don't put himself out none for people he don't like."

"And he *has* put himself out for me, hasn't he?" Ann said thoughtfully. "Spending all this time away from his own home."

"That's nothin' new. He's been enjoyin' himself," Mrs. Christmas said. "I'll be glad to have him back, though. You sort of miss havin' a man around the house, even when they're ornery."

"Colin isn't ornery," Ann said, in laughing protest. "He's the most thoroughly decent man I've ever known, I think."

"You ain't known many, have you? Oh, he's all right, even if he is a man."

"I like men, Mrs. Christmas," Ann said confidentially. "Better than women, I think."

"You ain't never lived with one yet," she retorted.

Ann walked slowly up the path to the new house. It still looked a little bare, though she had hurried the gardener as fast as she could, but he told her, "You can't hurry grass and shrubs, miss. They gotta just take their own sweet time

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a-growin'. I do the best I know how, and God's gotta do the rest."

She let herself in the front door, and took a final survey tour of the house. Everything was finished, now. The house looked comfortable, and livable. The furniture was modern—"comfortable-modern," Ann said—upholstered in creams and beiges. There were coffee tables in light colored woods, convenient to chairs. The lamps were white, with white shades. Bits of color came from the bright cushions on the couches, from copper cigarette boxes and pottery ash trays. The Raeburn hung above the mantel, lending a note of authenticity and serenity to the room. Ann paused to look at the picture, long and lovingly. "I've done my best, Margaret Duncan. Please help him to like it."

She felt a little guilty about the bedroom. It was a nice room, but "definitely co-ed," as she had read somewhere. There were twin beds, because they made for better looking decoration. If Colin didn't like it, he could move one of them out!

Satisfied with her tour, despite the bedroom, Ann went back to the living room, and sat down in the corner made in the bay window by the joining of the two couches, and looked out across the Sound. Now that the house was all done, and so completely everything she wanted in a house, Ann felt a little sad. And then, because after all these months of working with it, she was about to lose it, she shed a few tears. She didn't know just where she was going from there. Ever since last summer, when Colin had first proposed that she build this house for him, she had been so busy—her

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thoughts so completely occupied with its perfection, that she hadn't had much time to grieve over Jock. Even living in Colin's house had helped, because there was nothing in it to remind her of Jock. And then there was always Mrs. Christmas.

Mrs. Christmas had been a great and abiding joy to her. At first Ann set herself out to be charming, and succeeded to a degree that amazed her. Mrs. Christmas had capitulated very soon, and they became intimate friends. Ann could sit for hours and listen to her talk—she had plenty of tales to tell of Colin's boyhood, but her repertoire was far from being confined to tales of him, or even to eye-witness stories. She knew all about the earlier Drakes, and rejoiced in telling what she knew. Colin's ancestors took on a legendary quality, for Ann's eyes, and Mrs. Christmas' own inimitable manner added piquant flavor to the telling.

With her eyes on a white sail sweeping across the path of the sun on the Sound, Ann remembered the evening Alan had come home, and the family conference about Colin. Alan had been quite hardboiled about it. "He sounds like a good bet to me, Ann. Glom onto him, if you're a smart girl." Connie was more gentle. "I think he's nice, Ann. And I think he's doing more for you than you quite realize." Davey sided with Alan. "The gentleman not only is a distinguished writer, Ann, but he's a very prosperous guy as well. We carry his brokerage account, and he's doing right well for himself on the market. There's lumber and shipping money there, too. It's comparatively small change that he picks up from writing."

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The family meant well, Ann realized. Dad didn't say anything at all. Dad's whole attitude toward his children always was "They know what they're doing, so leave 'em alone." Ann frequently teased him, telling him that he was the perfect example of the absent-minded professor, and it really was remarkable, considering how late in life he'd started teaching.

Ann lit a cigarette, and propped her chin on her hand, her elbow on the window-sill. She thought perhaps it was the view she would miss the most. She liked views. Their own at home was negligible, since the advent of Funland. It was nice to have water and mountains to look out on. She was going to miss it like the devil. . . .

Deep in her reverie, she didn't hear footsteps across the thick carpet, but suddenly a hand was on hers, and a low, well-remembered voice said, "Hullo, my dear."

Ann turned, startled but joyful. "Colin!" she cried. "I thought you weren't coming till next week."

"After I wrote you, I got to thinking about home, and suddenly I couldn't wait any longer, so I hopped a plane and here I am. It's a very lovely house, Ann—will you show it to me?"

Ann crushed her cigarette out in an ash tray, and put her arm through his. Together they toured the house, Colin expressing unqualified approval of everything. Viewing the bedroom, his eyes were quizzical, but he made no comment, and Ann's carefully prepared defenses were never uttered. There seemed no point in them, when he didn't say any-

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thing. Back in the living room, he sat down at the piano, and struck a few notes.

"The piano frightened me," Ann confessed. "I don't know anything about them, and Mrs. Christmas told me you were awfully fussy. So I just had to do the best I could, and I had it tuned this morning. Is it all right?" she concluded anxiously.

He began to play, softly. "Very much all right," he assured her. "I couldn't have done better myself."

She curled up in a big chair, and listened. He played beautifully, with a sure, light touch. Ann, not musical herself, loved music that was well done.

As they walked back to the big house together, Ann asked him about his book. "It'll be out next month," he said. "I'm feeling particularly let down at the moment. I'll be that way until I start on something else, I suppose. I always am. I hope you'll like it, Ann."

"When will I see it?" she asked.

"When it comes out. You can wait till then," he said, laughing at her.

Ann made a little face at him. "My one chance to read a book in manuscript, and you won't let me do it," she protested.

"You'll have other chances, no doubt."

They sat together in the living room, before dinner. Colin looked at the blank space above the mantel, and said, "I feel a little lost without Great-Grandmother Margaret there."

"She's rather lovely where she is now," Ann murmured.

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Colin nodded. He looked across at Ann and asked, "What are you going to do now?"

Ann shook her head. "I wish I knew," she confessed. "*You* talk about feeling let down. How do you suppose I feel?"

"We'll try to think of something for you to do next," Colin said. "My house will serve as a wonderful recommendation of you, anyway."

Mrs. Christmas served dinner to them on a small table in front of the fire. It was a good dinner, and they treated it with proper appreciation, not talking much until over their coffee and cigarettes. It wasn't until Mrs. Christmas had cleared away the dishes, and Colin was holding a match to Ann's second cigarette, that he inquired, "And how's your private sorrow?" It was in a calm, matter-of-fact voice that he said it, leaving it to Ann to choose how seriously she answered.

"It's pretty awful, Colin," Ann said slowly. "You see, it's not a private sorrow at all. That was just a delusion of mine. Really, I had no idea Seattle was such a small town. I won't bore you with details, but—well, all winter I've thanked God—and you, Colin—that I could spend most of my time away from Seattle."

"And Jock?"

"I haven't seen him. We don't—perhaps fortunately—move in the same circles, since his marriage."

Colin regarded her gravely, and did not question the "perhaps fortunately." He undoubtedly understood what she meant. Colin usually did understand what she meant,

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but strangely enough it didn't make her uncomfortable. "And now?" he inquired.

Ann burrowed a little deeper among the cushions on the davenport. "Now," she said slowly, "I think I'm going to run away from it all and spend a month or so in Hollywood. Friends of my sister's have invited me to come stay with them for a while—and who knows? I might meet someone much more romantic than Jock in Hollywood—or perhaps on the boat. I've always heard a lot said for shipboard romances. Do you think I could scare one up, Colin? Everyone away from Seattle doesn't know that I've been considered Jock's property for more years than they care to count."

"I wouldn't be surprised. You're a romantic sort of person, Ann."

"*Me?*" she said, in genuine amazement. "I'm not, though—not really. I just think I am, and am surprised and pained that I can't find anyone to agree with me. That's all."

"When are you leaving?"

"A week from Saturday night, I think. Connie was to get my ticket for me today. Could you come down to see me off, Colin? I'd love having someone to see me off——"

"Would you kiss me goodbye if I came to Seattle?" Colin inquired, half humorously.

"I always kiss everyone in sight when I'm going on a trip," Ann promised lavishly.

"Well, I like a little more discrimination," Colin admitted. "Still, who am I to object to small favors?"

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"I don't know—who?" she retorted.

In a moment he was beside her, his arm around her shoulders drawing her close to him. He looked into her eyes, nearly golden in the firelight, for a moment, and what he saw there seemed to change his mind, for he released her and retired discreetly a foot or two away.

"I'm sorry, Colin," Ann said. She didn't know what had shown on her face, but she had felt a momentary, unaccountable terror. She looked at the clock, then, and sighed a little. "I suppose I'd better go home," she suggested.

"Must you?" he said perfunctorily, getting to his feet. "I'll drive you in, of course."

"It seems a shame to make you," she protested a little. "But I suppose it's the only way of getting me home so you can still have the use of your car. It's such a nice car, Colin. I've *loved* driving it. . . . I must go say good-bye to Mrs. Christmas first—I'll only be a minute."

In Mrs. Christmas' room off the kitchen, the old lady was nodding in her chair, the radio going full tilt close to her ear. Ann looked down at the tight white hair, brushed hard and slick to the small head, the lined face, gentle in repose. To Ann, she signified a phase of her life that had been subtly satisfactory, and to which she was saying goodbye. She felt tears in her eyes, as she bent over and kissed the wrinkled forehead. Mrs. Christmas woke, and said gently, a little wonderingly, "You're crying, child!"

Ann dropped to her knees, and buried her head in the gingham-aproned lap, and sobbed openly. "I d-don't know what's wrong with me," she gulped. "I never cry, r-really."

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I don't. I g-guess I'm just so sad at leaving you ——"

"There, there, child ——" The gnarled old hand was gentle on her head. "There, there. There ain't nothin' so bad as it seems at the time. You get over 'most anything, too. But by the time you're used to it you wonder what in time possessed you to think 'twas important. Now you just go off to Californy and have a lovely time, and everything will turn out just beautiful."

Ann wiped her eyes and hugged Mrs. Christmas. "You're an old darling and I don't know how I ever lived without you! I'm going to be such a good girl you simply won't believe it."

"I wouldn't believe it if you was anything else," the old lady said tartly. "Now you put some powder on that pretty face. You don't want *him* to know you was crying, do you?"

Ann took out her compact and lipstick and made hasty repairs. "I'll write to you," she promised.

"Don't you worry none about writing to anybody. You just run along and have a good time. That's all *I* want."

Ann was almost gay when she rejoined Colin, though she was thankful for the dim lights of the hall. She took his arm as they went down the steps together, and in the car she sat close beside him. After a while his right hand left the wheel, and held hers. They didn't talk very much, and when he had stopped the car beside her house, Ann turned her head and impulsively kissed his cheek. "You're such a very swell person, Colin Drake—one of the very nicest people in the world." Then she fled into the house.

5

ANN WAS A LITTLE DISAPPOINTED, AS THE BOAT PULLED out, but she waved gaily enough to Connie and Davey and Dad. Why hadn't Colin come? She hadn't realized how much she was depending on seeing him again. She scolded herself a little. There she went again—getting to depend on a man for every bit of happiness. Wouldn't she ever learn her lesson?

She took a turn or two around the deck before she went to bed, scrutinizing the passengers. There wasn't anyone who looked interesting. Perhaps she meant there wasn't an attractive, unattached man. Feeling rather let down, she turned in.

The next morning was grey and chilly. Ann put on a wool dress and a polo coat, pulled a felt hat down over one eye, took a fat book and went on deck. She stretched out in her deck chair, allowed the steward to tuck a robe around her, put on her horn-rimmed glasses and began to read.

Her eyes still on the book, but not reading, she thought. This was dull. Let there be no mistake about it, it was deadly dull. What had she expected from this trip? Sunlight sparkling on the blue water, and deck tennis, and tall

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romantic looking men, who had been to Africa and India and South America, to talk with and dance with and flirt with a bit. There was no sunlight, the water was sullen and lead-colored, she hadn't seen a romantic looking man yet—nor even a tall one.

When her spirits were at their lowest ebb, she heard his voice, and thought at first she was dreaming. "Of course it's rude of me," said the nice masculine voice, "but I always said I'd pick out the passenger reading Benson's *Lucia* as the one to get acquainted with first."

Ann looked up to see Colin standing beside her chair, smiling down at her. Her first thought was voiced, "But it isn't *Lucia*—it's detective stories," and her second thought was a panicky conviction that she looked awful. She took off her glasses, then, and hoped it helped a little.

"May I?" he asked, as he sat in the chair beside her.

Ann's third thought came unbidden. "Oh thank goodness I packed those flat-heeled sandals!" and then she said to Colin, "How do you happen to be here?"

"I didn't know you wore glasses," he said irrelevantly.

"Just to read with," she explained. "I expected to see you at the dock."

"I got on at Victoria," he answered. "I'm going to Hollywood myself. They bought one of my novels, and though the author is the last person on earth they want around a movie studio when they're filming a picture, one of my friends is doing the adaptation, and he said he'd like to have me within consulting distance. So here I am."

"What fun!" Ann said. "I had just decided that life

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was going to be—if possible—duller here than at home. And then you come like manna from heaven and save me from an untimely death due to ennui!”

Colin grinned at her. “Done your daily dozen yet?”

“Around the deck? I couldn’t face it alone. Is it an invitation?”

“It is,” he said, extending a hand.

What fun to walk fast along a heaving deck, her arm linked with his! What fun a grey, gloomy day, with the wind brisk and salt and wet against their faces! What fun to have a nice understanding, articulate sort of person around with whom to exchange confidences on deck-chair freaks and fellow-athletes!

From then on the trip was glorious. Neither of them was sick, though they had a rough sea all the way to San Francisco, and the dining room was half deserted. They explored the boat, they bet on the “horse-races,” they ate three meals a day together. All evening they danced—Colin danced as he did everything, competently and unostentatiously—and Ann never ceased to give thanks for the gold sandals, packed at the last moment, with their infinitesimal heels. When she wore them, Colin was a fraction of an inch taller than she, and Ann never felt for a minute that she towered. They would have a nightcap at the bar, and then Colin would say good night outside her stateroom door. Twice she kissed him. Oh, it meant a lot to have a man to do things with again!

Together they explored San Francisco, and in Chinatown Colin bought Ann an old jade ring, and she bought him a

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cigarette case, hammered silver, inlaid with turquoise. On their way back to the boat, they paused outside a telegraph office, and Colin asked, "Is someone meeting you at Wilmington?"

"I suppose so," Ann said. "They know when I'm coming."

"I have my car," Colin suggested. "There's no need for them to come clear to Wilmington to meet you—I can drive you to Hollywood as well as not. Unless, of course, you think they'd be shocked at our coming down here together."

Ann was silent a moment or two, and Colin started to go on. "Of course, if you think they'd be shocked, there's no sense in it."

She laughed at him. "I was just thinking," she explained. "Trying to think of something that would shock Taffy and Neil. It wasn't a success. Come on in—I'll send them a wire."

Ann was unimpressed by Wilmington. "Pooh!" she said. "I might as well have stayed home, where there's a harbor as is a harbor. Besides, it smells."

"It's the oil," Colin explained. "And don't sniff at it—it's liquid gold."

"It smells like something vile mixed up in a chem lab," Ann commented.

As they approached the city, Colin asked, "Where do your friends live, Ann?"

"Hollywood," she told him.

"Very enlightening," was his comment. "Have you any-

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thing more definite you could tell me? Some little clue of some sort—like an address or something? ”

Ann told him the address, but he remained in the dark. “See if you can find the Los Angeles map,” he instructed her. “It’s in the pocket on that side.”

She obediently did as she was told, but got sidetracked as soon as she had opened the map. The street names enchanted her, and she was trying to decide whether she would rather live on Tweed Lane or Tuxedo Terrace, when Colin pulled the car to the side of the road and took the map away from her. He studied it intently, and presently Ann said, “Have you found it? ”

“No,” Colin said crossly. “Why do they have to live in the Hollywood Hills? It’s like trying to find your way in a maze. If I can’t even find it on the map, how *can* I find it when we get there? ”

“I haven’t any sense of direction *at all*,” Ann said helpfully, as she peered at the map. She followed Colin’s finger, and said, “Gracious, don’t tell me those are *streets* going all squiggly-like? ”

“They’re streets,” Colin answered. He seemed to have found a clue, for he started the car again.

As they crossed Wilshire, Ann said, “I want to see Hollywood Boulevard.”

“Not tonight, my child. We’ll cross it, but only because we can’t avoid it. Do you realize that our boat was two hours late? ”

“Was it? ” Ann said, not very interested.

In spite of Colin’s dark forebodings, they found the

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Sheppards' house without much trouble. And a moment later Taffy and Neil were kissing her, and being introduced to Colin, and they were all sitting in the living room with drinks in their hands and an appetizing fragrance wafting in from the kitchen. Colin was staying to dinner, and they were suddenly all very good friends, and Taffy had several of Colin's books she wanted him to autograph, and Neil said, "I hope you're going to stay a long time," and Taffy said, "Of course he is, and we aren't going to let Ann go for ages and ages, and we'll have such *fun!*"

It was all very confusing, and it wasn't until they were at the dinner table that Ann felt she could collect her thoughts and look them over and make up her mind about things. She hadn't seen Taffy and Neil since their wedding, when Ann was eleven years old.

When she had been small, it always had been her expressed desire to be just exactly like Taffy Mackenzie when she grew up—but then she had shot up to a size where such a result was beyond the realm of possibility. What was Taffy's real name? She couldn't even remember. Taffy always had been Taffy, slight and fragile looking as a Dresden figurine, and quite the most beautiful thing in the world. She still was. She was three years older than Connie, and she looked younger than Ann. She was sweet and gay and charming, and she liked everybody in the world, and everyone quite adored her. Ann remembered her own eleven-year-old resentment when Taffy had told her she was going to marry Neil Sheppard. Who was Neil Sheppard anyway, that he rated Taffy? First of all he was *old*—he

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was thirty-five, and his hair was getting grey, and he didn't have very much money. Taffy fairly worshipped him. How jealous Ann had been that Taffy could love anyone so much!

Ann looked at Neil. He looked younger now, to her more mature eyes, than when she had first seen him. How right Taffy had been! Neil was big and homely and good, his hair a little greyer now, perhaps a little thinner—a very prosperous Neil, since the big money days of the movies. Neil, who had been everywhere in the world, and done everything, was technical advisor to the movie industry on everything from aviation to zoology.

Neil told them that he had a month off, and they mapped out a program of showing Ann the country. She acquiesced happily to all suggestions, but told Taffy they must first go shopping and buy her some clothes. Of course she could use more clothes, but it was shoes she had in mind. She couldn't wear golf brogues or gold sandals with *everything*. There ought to be something in between. No matter what she thought of Colin—and she really thought quite a lot of him—it seemed important that she shouldn't make him feel undersized when she was with him.

6

THEY WENT TO PALM SPRINGS, AND TO ARROWHEAD, AND to Caliente. They went to previews, and all the brighter night spots, and Ann had movie stars pointed out to her, and quite a few introduced to her. They went to Mt. Wilson, and Catalina, and even spent an evening doing Venice and Ocean Park, where Ann won fourteen spangled dolls (after a stupendous outlay of money on the part of Colin) which she promptly dispatched to the children's home in Port Drake—"to the everlasting horror of Mrs. Christmas," Colin warned her. They visited one movie studio and two broadcasting stations. They spent lazy days at one of the Santa Monica beach clubs, and Ann's creamy skin took on golden tones, and her gold-brown hair acquired streaks of copper and yellow. She viewed these latter with disfavor. "I'd like to be a blonde," she admitted, "but I'd rather go in for it a hundred percent. This Joseph's coat effect is nothing to aim for."

"If it's any consolation," Taffy laughed, "no one can accuse you of bleaching your hair. You'd certainly do a better job of it, if you did."

"You can afford to laugh," Ann said resentfully.

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"Doesn't *anything* touch that pink and white and pale gold effect of yours?"

They spent a week on a yacht that belonged to a screen writer and his wife. They were old friends of Colin's, too, as well as friends of Taffy and Neil, so Ann was the only stranger, and she didn't feel strange long. Bill Roberts didn't look like the (rumored) highest salaried screen writer. He just looked like a square, untidy man, past middle age, in very rumpled and dirty duck pants and sweat shirt. His wife Betty was an incredibly tiny brunette, with piquant features and a deep tan.

There were long lazy days in the California sunshine. There was much conversation, that Ann found deeply interesting. The only trouble was that there were likely to be several conversations going on at once, and it was difficult to choose the one to listen to. The last night on board, they went out on deck after dinner, and Taffy immediately called loudly for sweaters and coats. A stiff wind had sprung up, and it had turned cold. The sky looked threatening, and there was a heavy sea running. Before long, Taffy and Betty, to whom seasickness was a very active terror, went to bed, with a dose of Mothersills apiece. The rest of them stayed out on deck a while, trying to talk, but the wind whipped the words out of their mouths, and finally, chilled to the bone, they went below.

In the cabin it was cosy and comfortable. Bill mixed a rum punch, and Ann curled up in a wide leather seat, a glass in one hand and a cigarette in the other, and settled herself to listen. She had no illusions that she might have

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opportunity to talk. She had listened to Colin and Neil and Bill before. But it was interesting, and she liked the calm, safe feeling in the warm cabin, listening to the raging elements outside. She even liked the roll of the boat, for she never had been seasick in her life.

Ann felt that she was getting educated. It was a privilege to listen to men like these, expounding their own pet ideas in typical male talk. They hadn't forgotten her, because someone replenished her glass whenever it was empty, and there was always someone to hold a match or a lighter to her cigarette when she took a fresh one, but they didn't let her presence inhibit their conversation.

Perhaps they had been sitting there for two hours, when Ann said suddenly, in a momentary lull in the talk, "Colin, what does it feel like to be seasick? I think maybe I am—a little."

Colin looked at her in sudden concern. "How do you mean?"

"My head feels very funny—as if it weren't attached to my body any more, but was floating off somewhere in space—and I'm not quite sure that all my muscles will coordinate."

"Maybe the girl friend's a leetle bit tight," Bill suggested cautiously.

"How much have we been giving her to drink?" Colin asked.

Bill and Neil both confessed to having replenished her glass a number of times, and Colin admitted that he had done it a few times himself. "We're bright, aren't we? Ann

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drinks hardly at all, and we expect her to down drink for drink with us. Come along, darling—I'll take you down to bed."

As Ann walked down to her cabin, Colin's arm around her, she said, "I'm not really tight, am I, Colin? I've never been tight, and I'd hate to be silly."

"You aren't silly, darling. We're a bunch of mugs to give you so much to drink."

"I don't like girls who get tight, Colin," Ann insisted.

"You'll be all right, honey. Just tumble into bed. I don't want you to pass right out, because I suppose I'd have to get Betty or Taffy up to put you to bed if you did—unless I wanted Taffy to tear me limb from limb in the morning. Are you all right?"

"I'm all right," Ann said dreamily. "You know, you're awfully nice, Colin. If I am tight, I can't think of anyone I'd rather get tight with than you. Because you're so decent, and aren't trying to make love to me or anything. And you could, you know, very successfully. And I'd probably be sorry tomorrow, but tonight I think it would be perfectly lovely ——"

"Better pop into bed, Ann," Colin said hastily. "I'll see you in the morning. Good night, my dear."

Colin closed the door, and stood in contemplation outside of it for a moment or two. Then he shrugged his shoulders, lit a cigarette, and rejoined the others. "Now," he announced, "I'd like to do a little serious drinking."

7

THEIR FIRST DAY BACK IN TOWN, ANN FELT DESERTED. Colin didn't come over, and when she phoned him, he was a little vague about what he was doing that day, and made no suggestion of doing anything with her. She admitted to Taffy—for Neil had gone back to work—that she supposed she was being very presumptuous, but she had come to depend on Colin's being there when she wanted him. "I suppose," she said a little wistfully, "that I shouldn't think I have a mortgage on him. After all, he has lots of friends in Hollywood."

"Why don't you go shopping?" Taffy suggested.

Ann acquiesced moodily. "Maybe some new clothes would help," she agreed.

She didn't find anything she wanted to buy, but around two o'clock she located Colin, sitting behind a desk on a little raised platform, stacks of books at his side. And the books were all Colin's new book, which she hadn't realized was out yet. She picked up a copy, and went up to him. "I hadn't intended to buy one, Mr. Drake," she said formally, "but it simply breaks my heart to see you sitting here with a nice full fountain pen and nothing to do with it. Please

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autograph it for me, will you? My name's Ann Tucker ——"

The book buyer came up then, and said indignantly, "We've sold *hundreds* of copies of Mr. Drake's new book today. It just happens that no one is buying any at the moment ——"

"Listen, Ann," Colin said uncomfortably, "don't buy one. You know I'll give you one as soon as I get my copies ——"

Ann affected not to hear him, and carefully counted out \$2.50 to give the clerk. "Really, Mr. Drake," she said, "I hadn't thought that you would descend to doing this sort of thing to sell your books—and you aren't doing very well at it, either, are you?"

"If it weren't for my dislike of scenes, I'd spank you where you stand," Colin said grimly.

"That's not the right place for a spanking," Ann answered demurely. She accepted her sales slip from the clerk, and politely opened the book for Colin. He looked at her wrathfully for a moment, before he picked up his pen and began to write. "Dear Ann: Everything I've ever said—and a lot that I haven't—is still true. Colin."

Ann read it, then closed the book. "Thank you so much, Mr. Drake. A bit cryptic, but welcome. How long are you in for?"

"Thirty minutes longer, though I may get away sooner if business doesn't pick up. Will you meet me then and go some place and dance?"

"Love it," Ann said. "But you'd better tell the buyer

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that you already knew me—or she'll think me a shameless hussy to come in and pick up her pet author from under her very nose—and she might not think so much of you, either, come to consider it."

"I'll leave us both with spotless reputations," Colin assured her.

They drove out Sunset, and found a tea-cocktail-and-dance spot. "Tea or cocktail?" Colin asked.

"Mmmm—tea, I think," Ann said hesitantly. "I'm a wee bit suspicious of anything stronger since last night."

"Poor darling," Colin said softly. "You made me feel an awful bum, you know. I guess I just wasn't thinking ——"

"Oh, it's an experience every girl ought to have," Ann said lightly. "But, you know—I've been feeling lousy all day."

Colin looked worried. "Anything specific—like a hang-over—or just generally speaking?"

"Just generally speaking, I guess."

"Feel like dancing?"

"That's what we came out here for, isn't it?"

"But if you don't feel like it ——"

"Silly ——" Ann said. "I always feel like dancing with you."

People kept hailing Colin, and Ann met a vast assortment of them—famous names, and just names. Colin apparently knew everybody. Ann loved being with someone so well acquainted, but she was really feeling wretched, and got paler and paler. When Colin noticed it, he abruptly suggested going home.

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Ann was very quiet driving home. Once she stifled a little cry, and Colin looked at her sharply. "Ann, what is it? Had I better take you to a doctor?"

"Just a stitch in my side," she said soothingly, and wondered why her stomach kept churning around. When they reached the house, she lay down on the davenport, and quietly listened to Taffy and Colin. When Neil came home, she was still lying there, and he asked what was wrong with her—it wasn't like Ann to lie still and not talk at all. Ann said she didn't feel so hot, that was all.

She decided against food at dinner, but said she wasn't sick—she just didn't feel hungry, and they should run along and eat and leave her alone. She was *all right*! She smoked a couple of cigarettes, and then dropped off to sleep. A sharp, stabbing pain in her side made her shriek in agony and wake up, to find the others running to her, alarm on their faces. "I'm going to call a doctor," Colin said, going to the phone. He paused there and turned to Taffy. "Who is a good doctor?" he asked helplessly.

"Dr. Burns," she said, and gave him a number.

He dialed, and asked for the doctor. He wasn't there, so Colin left a message to locate him, and have him come straight to the Sheppard house. Then he went back to Ann, and sat on the edge of the davenport, fingers on her pulse, his eyes on his watch. "Hm," he said.

"And what is it, Dr. Drake?" Ann asked mockingly.

"I've called a doctor to find out that very thing," he said, quite seriously. "How's your side?"

"It hurts," Ann admitted. "Of course it can't be appen-

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dicitis—then it's a pain in your tummy, and my pain's in my side. I probably strained it landing that fish on the yacht the other day."

"No doubt," Neil agreed.

They all sat around looking at Ann anxiously and helplessly, until the doctor came. He took her into the bedroom, made a brief examination, then took a blood test. Ann followed him back to the living room. "What is it?" she asked anxiously.

"Can't say for sure till I take this over to the laboratory and have a white count made," he said. "In the meantime, clap an ice pack on that side, just to make sure. It's probably appendicitis."

"I *can't* have appendicitis!" Ann wailed. "I can't afford it!"

"We probably can bail you out of the hospital without clapping another mortgage on the old homestead," Neil said reassuringly. "Appendicitis isn't anything, Ann—an appendectomy isn't half so bad as a tonsillectomy—is it, Doc?"

"Not half," said the doctor, smiling at Ann. "Cheer up, youngster—it's nothing to worry about. I'll go straight over to the hospital and have the laboratory check this. If it is appendicitis, we'd better operate in the morning. No sense taking chances. I don't think it's a rush job, though—your temperature isn't high, so it won't be one of those high-speed jobs. I'll phone you from the hospital. If we decide to operate, you'd better come over there tonight."

Ann grew nearly hysterical at that, and the doctor said

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soothingly, "If it will make you any happier you can stay here tonight—I'll let you know."

While they sat around waiting for the doctor to phone, Neil and Colin kept up a barrage of wisecracks. It wasn't like Colin to go in for rapid-fire repartee, and it made Ann a little nervous. It seemed ages before the phone rang, and Colin leaped to answer it. "Yes . . . oh, it is . . . yes, I'll have her there." He hung up and turned back. "Tough luck, kid, but it is—your blood count is pretty high, and you have an appointment with the doctor at ten in the morning. I'm to get you to the hospital by eight."

"I'm not *afraid*," Ann assured them. "But, damn it, I hate to spend the money! I cost myself an awful lot."

Taffy helped Ann get ready for bed, and it developed that Colin intended to sit up with her. "The ice-cubes will have to be replenished every couple hours," he said. "Can the refrigerator keep up with the demand, Taffy? I haven't anything else to do—I might as well sit here, and do that for her, anyway. The doctor said she should be very quiet."

Taffy brought her a couple of white capsules and a glass of water. "Take these, darling—then you'll sleep ——"

Ann obediently swallowed them, then said in mild protest, "But I'm not in really awful pain, you know. I'll probably sleep anyway."

"You'll sleep better, now." Taffy leaned over her and kissed her lightly. "Good night, darling."

Ann settled back on her pillow, and clutched the ice-pack to her side, which really hurt her quite a lot more than she would admit.

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Colin sat in the living room, reading, keeping one eye on the clock. It was three-thirty, and Ann was still sleeping quietly. He went into her room and stood beside her, looking down at her face, so lovely and childlike in slumber. He knew—perhaps he had known for a long time—that this girl was dearer to him than anything else in life. Of course, appendectomies were no longer serious—but people *did* die from them. Something could go wrong. What did he know about this doctor? *Was* he good? Taffy had said so—but did Taffy really know? He lifted the blanket, and gently released her fingers from their clutch on the ice-pack. As he emptied it into the sink, and took out a fresh batch of ice-cubes, he wished fervently that he could go through with this in her place. Appendicitis operations were not pleasant—they were damned painful.

Colin read a whole book that night, and realized as he turned the last page that he didn't remember one single thing in it, though he had conscientiously read every word. At seven o'clock he took a shower and shaved. As he stood in the door of her room, Ann opened her eyes. "The fatal day," she said reflectively. "Darn it."

"How do you feel, Ann?"

"I feel swell. Don't you think that doctor made a mistake? Really and truly, I don't think I have appendicitis—ouch!" she said, with a wry face. "Well, maybe I have."

Ann had to be very firm with Colin to make him eat breakfast. "Hey!" she said. "I'm having this operation—you aren't. Give me a cigarette, and sit down and eat. I'll sit here and see that you do. I never saw people make such

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a fuss about such a little thing. Haven't you heard what marvelous meals they have in that hospital? In a couple of days I'll be eating everything and having a perfectly swell time. That's probably what I need more than anything else—a little peace and quiet, and I'm going to get it, if they do have to give me an anaesthetic to make me. Speaking of anaesthetics—Colin, will you promise to speak very firmly to them and see that they don't give me ether? I don't mind an operation, but I *do* mind ether."

Colin promised, and he and Ann together talked Taffy out of going along to the hospital. "It isn't necessary, Taffy, really," Colin said.

"I'll have more peace of mind if you aren't there, Taffy," Ann said. "Hospitals are horrible places when you're waiting around in corridors for something to happen."

As Colin stopped his car in front of the hospital, he said, "Should I go get a wheel-chair, Ann? I don't think those steps will be very good for you."

Ann said sharply, "I wish you'd stop trying to make an invalid out of me. I feel perfectly all right, and I'm quite capable of walking up those few steps."

They went through all the necessary formalities in the office, and as they started toward the elevator Ann said, "Colin, will you wire Connie telling her I'm okay when it's all over? I think we'd better let her know about it."

"I'll take care of everything," Colin assured her.

He left her in charge of a nurse at the door of her room, and then went in search of someone in authority. He finally

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found the supervisor of nurses, and stopped her. "How can I get in touch with Dr. Burns?" he asked.

She was a tall, stately woman, with red hair coiled around her head. She looked at his worried face with some amusement. "Aren't you on the wrong floor?" she asked. "Maternity is fourth floor."

Colin smiled slowly. "I'm not a prospective parent," he said. "Do I look like one?"

"Most of Dr. Burns' cases are. Why did you want to see him?"

"About an anaesthetic—he's performing an appendectomy at ten, and I wanted to make sure he won't administer ether."

"Who's the anaesthetist?"

Colin shook his head. "I don't know. I only know Dr. Burns is officiating."

"Um. Probably Dr. Scott. He usually uses spinal anaesthesia. Why?"

"*That's* all right, then. I promised her it wouldn't be ether."

"Won't you go down to the solarium while you're waiting? It's at the end of the corridor, to your left."

"Thanks," said Colin, and obediently went in the direction indicated.

There were morning papers there, and he looked at them with unseeing eyes, while he smoked a pack of cigarettes and assured himself from time to time that he wasn't a bit worried. A little before ten he went back to hover uncertainly outside the door of Ann's room. He stood there and watched

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while they wheeled a table in, and presently came out again. He walked along beside Ann, who lay smiling up at him, complaining bitterly at the fact that she hung over the end about six inches. Her face was freshly made up, and she grinned as she said, "We who are about to be operated upon—kiss me, Colin." He leaned and kissed the bravely lipstickked mouth, that quivered a little under his.

"I'm not scared," she assured him, and he felt a deep quick flash of sympathy for that small boy gesture, whistling in the dark, before the elevator doors closed in front of her.

The first half hour wasn't so bad, but after that he grew increasingly nervous. It shouldn't take so long—twenty minutes, wasn't that what they allowed for appendectomies? He was sure he'd heard that. What had gone wrong? Why was it taking so long? He hurried down and bought another package of cigarettes, then back to his vigil in the corridor. It was silly to be so nervous, of course. He was smoking too much—he hadn't had any sleep the night before. Of course Ann was all right. Three nurses had been stopped, each of whom assured him that Dr. Burns was absolutely tops.

It seemed centuries—ages—eons—before they were wheeling that white table with the quiet figure atop it back into the room. There were two nurses and an orderly with it. The orderly and one of the nurses came out. He stopped her. "Tell me—is she all right? Why did it take so long?"

"There were complications. She's very much all right. Just fine, in fact. The doctor will be down in a little while—you can talk to him, and he'll tell you more about it. Do you want to go in? She's been calling for you ——"

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Colin's pulse quickened at that, and he took a step toward the room, then hesitated. "You're sure it's all right—I won't make her worse?"

"She's had a hypodermic—she's all right. She's a nice game youngster—she wisecracked with us right up to the time she had to be given a whiff or two of gas ——"

"You didn't give her ether?"

"No—just a little ethyl chloride."

"That's good. I promised her, you see," Colin explained painstakingly. He went into the room, and the nurse sitting beside the bed smiled up at him, indicating a chair on the other side. She was bathing Ann's face, and all her brave makeup was gone, her face pale and wan now.

"I'm glad you're here," the nurse said. "I think you'll quiet her. She's been calling for you very insistently."

Colin took Ann's hand in his, and she opened her eyes briefly, but didn't look at him. "Oh, Jock," she said, "I knew you'd come."

"See?" the nurse whispered.

Colin nodded. His heart seemed to have turned to a great lump of lead in his chest. He did see, and the knowledge was more painful than he had believed anything possibly could be.

"Jock," Ann said fretfully, "can't you make all those people get off my stomach? At first there was just one of 'em sitting on it, but now I think they're playing football on it. What do they think I am, anyway—a gridiron or something? What's a gridiron, Jock? It sounds like something to make pancakes on. Darn it, can't they find some place else

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to go and play? They're hurting me *awfully*, Jock—make 'em stop, won't you please? I never asked you for very much, Jock—this isn't very much to ask, is it?"

Colin's eyes met the nurse's, and he asked, "Isn't there something you can do?"

"She's had a hypodermic," the nurse returned. "I can't give her another one until the doctor orders it. He said he'd look in a little later."

Ann's hand was lying quietly in Colin's. "I'm so thirsty," she said plaintively. "Can't I have a drink of water, please?"

Colin raised inquiring eyebrows at the nurse. She shook her head, and leaned over Ann. "It would make you sick, dear. We'll give her some intravenously pretty soon," she added to Colin.

"Well then why can't I have a glass of orange juice? It's supposed to settle your stomach. Mine would settle all right if all those people would get off it ——"

"Is it good for her to talk so much?" Colin asked anxiously.

"It won't hurt her. She'll quiet down after a bit—morphine affects some people that way—releases all their inhibitions and makes them talk."

"I see," said Colin, and thought bitterly—makes them talk and say the things they've been thinking all along but not saying ——

Ann was talking again. "Oh, Jock, it's so good to have you with me again . . . you know, it's very odd. . . . I must have been dreaming, I suppose. I thought—some-

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how—you fell in love with somebody else. You couldn't love anybody else, *could* you, Jock? There's never been anyone but me, *has* there?"

"There will never be anyone but you," Colin said, like a well-trained child conscientiously repeating the right answers.

"*That's* all right, then," Ann said, with a deep sigh.

She was quiet for a long while, then, and the nurse said to Colin presently, "She'll sleep all right now, I think. You'd better go home and get some sleep yourself. You look as if you needed it."

"I suppose I do," Colin said thoughtfully. He leaned over Ann and kissed her pale forehead. "My dearest love," he said softly.

As he left the room, he met Dr. Burns. "Is she really all right, doctor?" he asked anxiously.

"Who? Oh, Miss Tucker, of course. Yes, she's fine—splendid condition. Remarkably good health—but it's just as well we got that bum appendix out when we did—it would have kicked up quite a fuss for her very shortly. She'll get along splendidly."

"Thank you, Dr. Burns," Colin said.

He phoned Taffy to report on Ann's progress, then left the hospital and hunted up a Western Union office. He hesitated a little over the wording of the telegram, finally, after several tries, managed one that was reassuring and sent it off to Connie. He hesitated then, over what to do next. The idea of getting drunk, and staying that way, appealed strongly—but there was Ann to consider. He prob-

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ably would be able to cheer her up considerably in the next few days. Poor, dear Ann—very dear Ann. He'd go home and get some sleep. Perhaps he could be more cheerful when he was less tired. What was he glooming about, anyway? He had known Ann loved Jock—he had let himself be too impressed by the fact that she hadn't mentioned him for a while. Life was a vicious circle—Colin loved Ann, who loved Jock, who loved Nina, who loved—well, perhaps Nina loved Jock. It would be nice if someone were getting some satisfaction out of this.

8

ANN LOOKED AT HER WRISTWATCH, AND SIGHED HEAVILY. Her face had been washed and her teeth brushed at six o'clock, and here it was not yet seven, and no prospects of breakfast or anything else to break the monotony before eight. She had finished the last crop of mystery yarns the night before, and Colin wasn't due with the next consignment before ten o'clock. Ann was bored and restless. For the past several days she had been insisting to the doctor, the nurses, Colin, Taffy, and anyone else who could be persuaded to listen to her, that she was being kept in the hospital under false pretenses. She was perfectly well, and here they hadn't even let her sit up yet. It was perfectly disgusting.

She opened the drawer of the bedside table and proceeded to give herself a new paint job. The original one, applied less than an hour earlier, was still in good shape, but it gave her something to do. She put the last lick of lipstick on, and frowned at her reflection. Her hair was certainly a mess. Oh, for a finger-wave—she wouldn't even beef at having to sit under a dryer. She put all the cosmetics back and settled the three little fracture pillows more comfortably

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around her. Then she broke the rule of a lifetime and smoked a cigarette. Always Ann had firmly believed that smoking before breakfast was one of the cardinal sins—it gave you ulcers and spoiled your complexion and ruined your disposition. But one must do something. It was while she was crushing it out in the ash tray, with the reflection that cigarettes didn't taste very good to an empty stomach, that she suddenly remembered that it was Sunday. She seized the telephone, and asked that a paper be sent up to her.

She picked up the rotogravure section, and let her eyes wander idly over a page of candid camera shots of movie colony celebrities. Suddenly she stiffened, and hurriedly looked for the caption. "Diana Cherrill lunching with Colin Drake at the Brown Derby." It was Colin Drake, all right, but it wasn't Diana Cherrill—it was Ann Tucker, and a very flattering picture at that. How could they have made such a mistake? Of course, if they had realized it was plain Ann Tucker, and not a screen star, the picture wouldn't have been printed—not even with Colin in it. She looked at it more closely—perhaps there was a certain superficial resemblance—in the picture. Ann didn't flatter herself that she really looked like Diana Cherrill, who had been a glamor girl for almost as many years as Ann remembered.

Ann was still studying the picture, and trying to make up her mind to squander a dime on a telephone call to Taffy, when they brought her breakfast. And then her bath was scarcely over and her bed changed, before the doctor came and told her she was going to sit up in a wheel-chair that

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morning. Colin arrived while Ann was being helped to put a little pink wool bedjacket on over her nightgown, and she said excitedly, "Colin, Colin, do you know who I am?"

"I knew yesterday. Who are you today?" Colin was smiling at her."

"I'm Diana Cherrill! Really and truly! It says so in the paper——"

Colin frowned. "What are you talking about, Ann?"

"Well, either I'm Diana Cherrill or she's wearing my clothes and lunching with you at the Brown Derby, and I think probably that means I'm Diana Cherrill, because though she might lunch with you at the Brown Derby, she certainly wouldn't wear my clothes. No glamor girl in her right mind would—it's in the rotogravure, Colin—do look."

He picked up the paper, and scanned it hurriedly. Then he frowned again. "Stupid mistake. You're years younger than she—and much better looking."

"Uh-huh!" Ann scoffed.

"Are you ready to get up, now?" the nurse asked.

"Oh, yes!" Ann said. "Big day for the girl, Colin—picture in the rotogravure, and sitting up in a wheel-chair. Who'd ever think it would be a Big Adventure to sit up in a wheel-chair? Are you going to wheel me around, Colin? Take me to the solarium—or maybe clear up to the roof-garden?"

"Here—here," the nurse said. "If you're going up to the roof-garden, you have to have more clothes on."

"Don't be silly," Ann argued. "Here I've been lying in bed, day after day, in this torrid weather, melting quietly

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away without a word of complaint—and when I get a chance for some fresh air, you say I have to have more clothes on. Now if I just had a bathing suit—though I suppose I'd look sort of silly in a bathing suit, with all this fancy corset-effect on my tummy ——”

“We'll put a blanket around you,” the nurse said competently. She wheeled the chair close beside the bed, and draped a blanket over it. “Here we go,” she said gaily.

Ann hung her feet over the edge of the bed, and said, “Oh!” in a surprised voice.

“Now I suppose we've been keeping you in bed under false pretenses,” the nurse jeered. “Will you help me with her, Mr. Drake?”

Colin put his arm around Ann, and said, “Steady, now ——”

She was on her feet only a couple of seconds between the bed and the wheel-chair, and Colin and the nurse were holding her, but the world seemed suddenly a very insecure place. “It's so funny,” she said, gasping a little, as the nurse tucked the blanket around her in the chair. “I felt so well in bed, and when I got on my feet my knees and my stomach seemed to buckle ——”

“You're awfully thin, Ann,” Colin said. “Are you eating enough?”

“Probably not,” Ann admitted. “Food doesn't interest me very much—and do you know, Colin, I don't like coffee any more? What do you suppose they did to me that I don't like coffee now?”

“Maybe it's not good coffee,” Colin said sensibly.

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"Truer word was never spoke," the nurse agreed grimly. "Be careful with her, Mr. Drake. See that she's warm enough—we don't want her to have pneumonia."

The sun was warm and bright on the roof-garden. It was nice to get away from the four walls of the hospital room. Ann went on discussing the picture in the paper.

"How do you suppose it happened, Colin? I don't look that much like her, I'm sure. Did you know they had taken that picture? I didn't. Do you know Diana Cherrill, Colin?"

"Yes, I know her."

"Oh, of course—I'd forgotten that you knew everybody in Hollywood."

"God forbid!" Colin exclaimed involuntarily.

Ann continued, "When did they take that picture? It must have been ages ago—before we went out on Bill and Betty's yacht. We haven't had lunch any place since then, have we?"

"No, I don't think so." Colin seemed abstracted. "Do you want to just sit, Ann, or should I wheel you around?"

"Oh, just sit, I think. I'm so sick of the hospital, Colin—but I can't expect Taffy to wait on me, so I suppose I'll just have to stay here till I'm well. Then I'll go home. I don't suppose a boat trip will be too tough, do you? I can just lie around in deck chairs all day ——"

"Homesick, Ann?"

"Just a little. Or—perhaps it's not that so much—but I'm afraid I haven't the proper temperament for Hollywood, Colin. It's been fun, and exciting, and all that—but I

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haven't felt that I was being *me* down here. I'm not a Hollywood sort of person, I'm afraid."

"No—you aren't," he agreed. "But you're a very dear sort of person, you know."

"I've appreciated your being so nice to me, Colin. It's been awfully swell of you to waste all your time on a little nobody from the northwest, when you could be escorting beauteous damsels hither and thither."

"I've been escorting a beauteous damsel hither and thither," he promptly responded.

"Nice man," Ann said, yawning a little in the warm sun.

Colin looked at his watch, and said, "Time to go back, Ann." At her protest he said merely, "I promised," and wheeled her back to the elevator.

The nurse sent Colin away, with the stern edict that Ann must rest, so she settled back among her pillows and went on reading the paper. And in idly perusing a movie gossip column, she came across another startling item. "Diana Cherrill and Colin Drake are rewarming last year's hash." Which seemed a singularly inelegant way of putting it, peculiar to gossip columns. So that was the reason for the inexplicable caption under the rotogravure picture—and that was what Colin had meant when he said that he'd been escorting a beauteous damsel—and she had smugly taken it as a compliment to herself. Her ears grew pink at the remembrance.

When Taffy came to see her that afternoon, Ann questioned her eagerly. "What is this I see in the paper, Taffy? Is Colin getting involved with a movie star?"

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"Oh," said Taffy vaguely, "you mean Diana. I guess she'd like to. Her pictures have been less and less box office, and probably the idea of retiring with a nice income appeals to her."

Ann stirred restlessly. "She's beautiful, but Colin is too nice to be caught by a gold-digger. Do you think he's likely to be?"

"Don't ask *me* what any man is likely to do! Colin seems intelligent enough, but he may be as dopey as the usual run of men. Though he wouldn't exactly be running into it blindfolded."

"You mean—it's—well, this column said something about 'last year's hash'—horrible expression—you mean it would just be resuming an old relationship?"

"I don't know, really, Ann. There was talk, but there's often talk. I didn't know Colin before you brought him to the house, and I don't get around much anyway."

"It's just my literary curiosity," Ann explained carefully. "You see, Colin had mentioned an experiment in marriage without benefit of clergy that turned out badly, and I was just wondering—that's all."

That was all Ann would admit—but although it was easy enough to take the women in Colin's past in her stride, Ann was uneasily conscious of a most unbecoming dog-in-the-mangerish attitude toward a woman in Colin's present.

* * *

Ann was stretched out in a deck chair on the terrace, lazy in the afternoon sun. Neil was sprawled on a blanket at her side smoking his pipe and yawning a little over the Sunday

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paper. Taffy had gone inside to give Chiquita instructions about supper.

Ann reached for the package of cigarettes beside her chair, but couldn't quite make it. "Neil," she said, "would you mind tossing me a smoke?"

Neil obediently handed her the package, and held his lighter for her, then relaxed again, and lay on his back looking up at her.

"Though I suppose I should be worried about your being so thin, Ann," he said, "I do rather like that slightly undernourished look you have lately . . . it makes you look rather more grown up."

"I like it too," Ann confessed, "though Colin has been fussing about it a good bit."

"Colin coming over?"

"I imagine. Though I haven't seen much of him since I left the hospital."

"He's been working, you know."

"So he says," Ann retorted cryptically.

Neil blew a thoughtful smoke-ring. "Don't you believe him, Ann? He devoted a good bit of time to you, you know, and he felt he had to get back to work again. He's not a born idler."

"I know. But I read the gossip columns. Just one more of those bad habits I've acquired in Hollywood."

"Oh," said Neil, and there was a little silence. He lay staring straight up into the cloud-flecked sky. "Hollywood gossip columns are not models of truth and honor, you know, Ann."

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"Wasn't there an old adage about any amount of smoke requiring a certain amount of fire?"

"Not necessarily a fire that is still burning. Sometimes one that has been out for a long while will keep on smoking." Neil sat up with sudden energy, and said, "My God, you've got me doing it! Let's forget the parables, Ann. We're both talking about Colin and Diana Cherrill. What do you want to know about it? I can undoubtedly tell you."

There was a little silence, while Ann tried to think of a polite way of phrasing her questions. Because there were quite a few things she wanted to know. But the words didn't seem to come easily. After all, what business was it of hers, really?

Presently Neil went on, as if she had spoken, telling her what she wanted to know with uncanny prescience. "They aren't having an affair—not now. Nothing is further from the desire of either of them. Diana's having some difficulties, and she turned to Colin with them. Colin has a curious and rather charming faculty of keeping women's respect when he no longer has their love. They weren't ever married, but Diana's position is rather that of an ex-wife, after a completely amicable divorce. I know her rather well, and she's a nice person. I think you'd like her. Diana says frankly that they split up because Colin took too much living up to, and she found it too wearing. He was always, inevitably, right—neither superciliously nor obnoxiously right—just plain right. There weren't very many things they saw eye-to-eye on, and neither was willing to make the necessary adjust-

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ments. They parted with mutual gratitude that they had had sense enough not to marry."

Ann didn't say anything at first, then nervously lit another cigarette, and met Neil's eyes. "Neil, am I being a hopeless little prig? But I hate—hate—*hate* knowing about her! I knew about her—that is, I knew that there was someone other than his wife that Colin had lived with for some time—but I didn't know that it would make me feel so squeamish and queer to find out that she was an actress—and—well, and still around."

"Ann," Neil said seriously, "tell me—are you in love with Colin?"

"No," Ann said quickly, "of course I'm not. But I rather think he's the best friend I've ever had, and he's probably the nicest person I've ever known."

Neil started to say something, but broke off as Taffy came out, waving a letter. "A special delivery for you, Ann," she called, "from Connie."

Ann was frightened, and tore the letter open hastily.

"Bad news?" Taffy asked, watching her face.

"Pretty bad ——" Ann said. "Our home burned down the night of the Fourth. Listen—'All the neighbors who happened to be at home spent practically hours trying to persuade the fire department to come out and do their bit, but the chemical division requires cash on the line or a responsible guarantor to go outside the city—and they weren't convinced. No water available, you see—which seems sort of silly with a whole lake at the door. Anyway, the insurance company will pay up like lambs, I guess—

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and sue the carnival people for criminal negligence. It was their fireworks that caused it. Bright idea they had to encircle the entire lake with fireworks—and of course they got a bit more than they'd bargained for. It's tough on Dad, to lose all his books and the family heirlooms and what not—but maybe it's all for the best. The house was a white elephant, too big for us to use and impossible to sell. Davey and Betsey and I have moved into a little house—we had all our furniture stored in Davey's mother's garage, you know—and Dad has moved to the club. We can offer you a davenport in the living room when you return, Ann, and we'll work out something more satisfactory and permanent when you get back. That is ——' ” Ann broke off, and read the rest of the letter to herself.

“ I think so too,” Neil said, watching Ann.

“ What? ” Taffy wanted to know.

“ Never mind,” Neil said. “ Ann knows what I mean.”

I wouldn't, Ann said rebelliously to herself. I wouldn't marry Colin for a home. I probably wouldn't be asked, anyway. Has he ever made love to me? No. Could I make him, if I wanted him to? Could anybody make Colin do anything he didn't want to? Of course not. Do I even want him to?

But later in the evening, in the short while after sunset before it was entirely dark, with Colin sitting on the grass beside her chair, holding her hand and making cheerful and easy conversation, Ann watched his lean dark face, with the deep laughter-lines in it, and wondered if she were losing her mind. For she was contemplating, half dreamily, what a nice face that would be to live with.

9

THEY GOT OFF THE BOAT AT VANCOUVER, AND ANN DROVE down to Port Drake with Colin, to have the first dinner in his new house with him. She sent a wire to Connie, while Colin phoned his instructions to his housekeeper.

Mrs. Christmas met them at the door. "'Bout time you was gettin' back," she said. She looked Ann over carefully. "Huh, been starvin' yourself, I see. Well, we'll fix that soon enough."

Ann hugged her briefly. "Aren't you glad to see us?" she demanded.

Mrs. Christmas said, "Hm. Maybe. Dinner's ready," she said, "soon's you are."

As Colin took Ann's coat, he looked at her searchingly. "Nice to be here?"

"Very nice, Colin. How I love this place—conceited wretch that I am!"

Mrs. Christmas served their dinner in the dining room, and vanished afterward. They took their own coffee into the living room, and sat together on the davenport before the fireplace, where a small fire of alder logs took the chill off the evening air. Ann set her coffee cup down on the low

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table beside her, and snuggled back into the corner, tucking her feet up under her.

"Do you suppose it would be all right for you to dance?" Colin asked, going over to turn on the radio.

"I'm *well*," Ann said. "It's all right for me to do *anything*."

She tossed her cigarette into the fireplace, and he took her hand and drew her to her feet. They danced for a little while, then stopped beside the radio, and Colin turned it down a little. He looked into Ann's face and said softly, "My dear ——" and together they moved back to the davenport. Sitting there, Colin's arm about her shoulders, Ann felt curiously content. This was where she belonged, here in this house, with a wise, kind, understanding man to lean against. She looked up into the face of Margaret Duncan, smiling down on them from over the mantel, and said softly, "This is a lovely place, Colin. It is the absolute ideal of my whole life, come true for me. Thank you so much for making it come true. One can so seldom realize one's dreams ——"

"Ann," Colin said.

She turned her face to his, and he kissed her—gently at first, and then with more insistence as he found in her an answering passion that met and matched his own. Presently she said, halfway between laughter and tears, "Oh, Colin—damn you, Colin, why haven't you made love to me before? We've wasted so much time ——"

"Did you want me to?"

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"So very much," she said. "Oh, Colin—why haven't you?"

He shook his head, and didn't answer. Then, tightening his arm about her, he said, "You love my house, Ann—I wonder if you could love it enough to take me on with it?"

Funny—and very humble—of Colin to word his proposal like that. Her first proposal, too—— Something in that thought sobered her quickly, and taking his face between her hands and kissing him to soften the words, she said, "My dear, I can't marry you."

Very quietly Colin released her, and picked up a cigarette. As he held a match to it, he inquired in a detached manner, "Why not? I'll admit I haven't a very good record. I've never made a woman happy yet, of course—perhaps it's merely my sunny optimism that makes me so sure I could make you happy."

"May I have a cigarette, Colin? Thank you. Because—oh, it sounds so horrid when I say it, but I don't love you——"

"A moment ago," Colin said slowly, "you rather led me to believe that I am at least not actively distasteful to you."

"Darling! What have you been reading? Of course you're not—quite the contrary, in fact. How shall I put it—I'm young and healthy, and so are you—but it's just that it wouldn't be giving you a square deal. You're such a splendid sort of person, Colin. You deserve the best."

Colin walked over to the fireplace, and leaned his elbow on the mantel. "Do you think I'm too old?" he asked casually.

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"Don't be silly. I'll be twenty-four day after tomorrow myself."

"I was thirty-nine last month."

"You didn't tell me when it was your birthday," Ann said reproachfully.

"A thirty-ninth birthday is not something to be celebrated—not when you love someone who is fifteen years younger," he commented drily.

"Colin," Ann said slowly, "I'll be honest with you. For several months now I've had a new dream-picture. Not anything I consciously thought up, but there—in the back of my mind. I've seen myself as your wife, living with you in this house, sharing your life. I like you better than anyone I've ever known—I admire and respect you. I've wanted—and hardly knew I wanted—you to make love to me, and bring things to a head—and then, when you did, I suddenly realized what a lousy thing I'd be doing to you if I accepted you under those conditions. And, Colin, why do you want me? I'm not beautiful—I'm not even very bright, though I've always had some pretty illusions on the latter score ——"

"You walk beautifully—you hold your head up—you have a nice body, and a more than ordinarily beautiful voice—your smile is lovely, and makes my heart turn over—oh, damn it, Ann, it can't be analyzed. I love you, you little idiot!"

Ann said hesitatingly, "Are you sure you don't want someone who is really beautiful—like Diana Cherrill, for instance?"

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"Oh, damn Diana!" Colin exploded. "I've been accused of many things in my life, Ann, but no one has ever suspected me of being so weak-minded that I would be proposing to one woman when I was yearning for another."

"But I want to be fair to you, Colin ——"

He looked down at her, and smiled a little. "My dear," he said, "I'm really old enough—and experienced enough—to judge for myself what would be fair to me. Would it make any difference if I told you that whether you love me or not, nothing in the world would make me so happy—could make me so happy—as to have you for my wife? Would it make any difference, Ann?"

Ann hesitated only a moment, before she rose and went over to him. She put both hands on his shoulders, and looked into his eyes. "Colin," she said softly, "I think I'll be a very good wife to you."

"Without regrets?" he asked, before he kissed her.

"Without regrets—for either of us," she said.

The doorbell wakened Ann, and she sat up sleepily, sniffing a delicious aroma of coffee that came in from the dining room. Connie passed her, on her way to open the front door, with a casual "Hi!"

Alan followed Connie back into the room, and Connie came over to sit beside Ann and hug her tempestuously. "Oh, it's swell having you back, Ann. We've missed you a lot."

"How are you, baby?" Alan said. "It's good to see you."

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"How come you're here?" Ann demanded. "Not that it isn't nice to have you ——"

"Longshoreman's strike, and we happened to be in port when it started," Alan explained.

"Good," said Ann. Then hastily, "It's too bad about the strike, but it'll be nice to have you here for ——"

"Connie!" wailed a small voice from the dining room. "Where's Ann?"

Ann's mouth fell open in astonishment. "That isn't Betsey!" she said. "I can't have been away that long—that Betsey is pronouncing her consonants!" She swung her feet out, and felt for her slippers. Then, as she got to her feet, she tripped over her nightgown, and Alan quickly caught her.

"Steady on, youngster," he said casually. "Want a robe?" He picked up her robe, and held it for her. She slipped into it, and hurried out to hug Betsey, and kissed her, sublimely indifferent to the butter and jam that decorated her own face by the act.

"Hullo, Ann," Betsey said, beaming. "Bring me somep'n?"

"You filthy little gold-digger," Connie said reproachfully. "Nice way we bring up our children—cupboard love, or something."

"Did you, Ann?" Betsey persisted.

"Sure I did, lamb. Mind if I wash my face and brush my teeth and have some breakfast first?"

Betsey considered it. "Aw-right," she conceded magnanimously. Then she wrinkled up her face in a smile that

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affected eyes, nose and mouth equally, and said affectionately, "Nice Ann."

"Better wait till you see your present before you commit yourself so recklessly," Ann advised.

She made up her face and extracted the family presents from her suitcase before she came back to the breakfast table. And over her orange juice she imparted her news, quite casually. "I'm going to marry Colin, folks. Next week, I think."

Connie rushed over and kissed her. "Oh, honey, I'm so glad," she said. "I can't think of anyone I'd rather have in the family."

"You work slow, but you get there," Alan conceded rather loftily. "I thought he was a pretty nice guy."

"The best," Ann agreed promptly.

"Ahoy, there!" a deep voice shouted at the open window, and Ann turned to see her father leaning on the sill. She ran across the room, and leaned out the window to kiss him. "Dad, darling! Haven't you any classes?"

He was vague on that point. "I felt it imperative to see my youngest daughter and determine for myself whether or not her health was good, and all that sort of thing."

"You might come around to the door, and I'll let you in," Connie suggested. "I might even give you a cup of coffee, if you're very unusually good ——"

"I'm a model of propriety," he protested, in some indignation.

They laughed and talked gaily, and it was Connie who broke the news of Ann's impending marriage. Mr. Tucker

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looked affronted. "Certainly not, Ann. I couldn't consent to such a thing. Who is this man? I've never even seen him. What utter nonsense!"

"Oh, too utterly utter," Ann agreed. "That's all right, Dad, I'll see that you meet him before you have to give me away to him. You'll like him well enough—Connie and Alan are quite mad about him, and Davey advised me to marry him—oh, ages ago. He should be very pleased at seeing me follow his advice so meekly."

"Ann's doing right well for herself," Alan volunteered. "I don't know whether Colin is or not, but that's up to him. He's the only competent judge of that."

"I hope he's right," Ann said soberly.

Ann was unpacking boxes, and putting things on hangers in Connie's closet, when she heard Colin's voice. She stuck her head out the door and shouted:

"Hi, Colin! Come and see all the things that I've got."

He came and was properly admiring as Ann exhibited her purchases. "Connie was quite insistent that I do you proud, Colin," she laughed. "You know, clothes have never meant very much to me—I conscientiously look through each copy of *Vogue* from cover to cover, but it doesn't mean a thing to me. I'm never smartly clothed except through the purely fortuitous circumstance that something that happens to be smart also happens to look well on me. I buy my clothes with only one idea in mind—is it becoming? If it is,

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and is the proper distance from the floor for the current mode, I'm perfectly satisfied."

"You always look lovely," Colin said warmly.

Ann was untying a shoe box. "You know," she said conversationally, "there's only one thing I mind about marrying you, Colin ——"

"What's that?"

"I'll have to wear low heels for the rest of my life," she said mournfully. "Oh well—my feet aren't big, thank goodness, and I'll probably get used to it, and you know ——"

"What?"

"It's probably very silly of me, but, Colin"—she put her arms around his neck and regarded his face very closely—"I'm *so* convinced that it will be worth it."

"I'll do my best to keep you in that frame of mind," he said soberly.

They were going to have a very small wedding, in the church at Port Drake. Ann shed a tear or two over her vanished home, with its lovely curved staircase that would be so perfect for a bride to descend in all her glory—she still could remember with perfect clarity how lovely Connie had looked descending that staircase at her wedding eleven years ago—but lacking that, a small and informal church wedding seemed the only solution. Ann insisted on the smallness. She declared fervently that big weddings were indecent and barbaric. It wasn't anyone's business but the people involved. Oh, she'd yield a point and have the family present—she supposed that she'd have to—but not anyone

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else. Then she yielded another point and asked Mrs. Christmas, so she wouldn't be hurt.

Her father, in spite of his initial protest, was amiable as usual about Colin. He liked him at once, and involved him in so many discussions on literature that Ann inquired indignantly was Colin marrying her or was he marrying her family? She'd like to see him occasionally herself. They had lots of things to talk about, and it would be a friendly gesture on the part of her family to allow her to see him occasionally.

It was the night before the wedding, and Connie and Davey had discreetly retired, leaving Ann in possession of the living room and Colin. Ann had been packing, and was wearing a blue sweater and slacks. She dropped down on the floor at Colin's feet, as he sat on the davenport in front of the fireplace, and leaned her head back against his knee. "Give me a cigarette, Colin?" she asked lazily.

He lit one for her, then dropped his hand to her shoulder. "Happy, Ann?" he asked.

She put her hand over his. "Perfectly," she murmured.

There was a little silence, and then Colin asked, "Have you seen Jock?"

Ann stiffened, and sat up straight, away from him. "No," she said coldly.

"Don't you think you should? I mean—well, it's silly of me, I suppose, but don't you think you owe yourself that?"

Ann got to her feet, in one lithe movement. She walked over to the fireplace, and leaned against the mantel. "Colin, aren't you being unnecessarily chivalrous?"

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He seemed a little pale, but his voice was steady as he answered, "I don't quite know what you mean, Ann."

"Oh, Connie's been after me to see Jock—she says I should, to convince myself that he doesn't mean anything to me any more. Connie's so good—she can't quite believe that I'd do anything mean or dishonorable. Is it necessary that I tell her that I don't want to see him because I'm afraid—because he *does* mean something to me—something no one else can ever mean, so long as I live? I told you I'd never let you down, and I won't, but — Oh, Colin, don't you see? When I become Ann Drake, that part of my life that was Ann Tucker's is being put behind me. Jock belonged in that life—he was an important—an essential—part of that life. But he won't be anything in the life of Ann Drake. She won't even know that he exists. She won't ever see him, or think of him —"

Colin looked troubled. "Ann, you can't do that with life—neatly divide it off into water-tight compartments. Something out of one compartment is always spilling over into the next one, no matter what you intend."

Ann stared down at the floor, and drew a diagram on it with the toe of her slipper. "Colin —" she said slowly.

"My dear?"

Tears came into Ann's eyes at the gentle, affectionate words. "Colin, I can't bear it when I hurt you. You're so good—so much better than I deserve. *Am* I being mean and dishonorable to marry you?"

He came up to her and took her in his arms. "My darling—you couldn't be mean or dishonorable if you tried.

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You're frank and honest and trustworthy, and I'm more proud than I can say that you're willing to marry me. And Ann"—very humbly he said it, his tone so low she scarcely caught the words—"all my life it shall be my job—a labor of love, my sweet—to make you happy and content."

Ann's eyes were still a little wet as she looked into his. "Colin," she said softly.

"Um?"

"We're going to be very happy."

10

COLIN HAD NONE OF THE ECCENTRICITIES ANN EXPECTED from genius. Sometimes she was almost afraid he wasn't a genius after all—he was so nice. If there had been anything that had given her qualms about marrying him, it had been the thought that he would take a great deal of living up to. But Colin in private life was amazingly lacking in dignity, and taught her all sorts of jolly little vulgarities whose existence she never had suspected. There was no doubt of it. Living with Colin was fun.

Ann loved managing a house. She had a credulous mind, and no sales resistance. In her first month as a housewife, she bought an incredible assortment of goods, from every salesman who came to her door. She didn't have to worry about money. Colin didn't give her an allowance, but she could write checks on his account, with the comfortable assurance that there always would be money to cover them.

Ann hadn't wanted servants. She said in such a small house she could perfectly well do the work herself. Besides, there wasn't any place for them. So they had been getting along very well with Helga Carpello coming in once a week for washing and ironing, Mrs. Larson (whose first name

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Ann never did discover) for heavy cleaning, and Susie. Susie was the oldest orphan in the Home, and Ann had early fallen slave to the charm of her big brown eyes and small freckled face. Ann hired her by the hour—and then forgot to give her any work to do. Susie was good company, and Ann was human, and not at all averse to receiving all the love and homage that had been stored up in a lifetime in that orphan heart.

Susie's charming confidences had first won Ann to her. Her memories of her childhood were enchanting. Ann had had a reasonably idyllic childhood herself, with parents who loved her a great deal, and just about everything she wanted—but her own childhood seemed insignificant beside Susie's. There were scores of reminiscences—all charming, all speaking of prosperity and happiness. One day Ann asked Colin, "How did Susie lose her parents?"

He looked at her quizzically. "Darling, didn't you know?"

"Know what, Colin? Colin, they couldn't have abandoned her—they loved her!"

"That's something neither you nor I—nor Susie—will ever know. Susie never knew her parents, Ann. She doesn't know, for sure, that she wasn't like Topsy and 'just growed.' But she feels that she must have had the usual quota, and she isn't hampered by facts in making them quite the nicest parents that ever were. She has several theories on what became of them—all romantic, and mostly leaving scope for a happy ending. In reality, she probably was the thirteenth or fourteenth child of a mine or mill

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worker, who decided he already had enough mouths to feed, and that someone else could worry about this one."

"The poor lamb," Ann said slowly, "the poor, dear lamb." Somehow, the knowledge that Susie never had known the happy life she pictured made Ann love her more, and want to give her as much happiness now as she could.

One day Colin found Ann on her knees, wielding a hammer and screw-driver expertly over some packing-cases. The last lid came off, and she settled down happily to unpacking books. Finally they were all neatly piled, shiny and new, green and brown and red and blue and gold. She settled back on her heels and regarded them with satisfaction.

"Well?" Colin asked.

"Aren't they lovely?" Ann demanded.

"Well ——" Colin said, a little doubtfully. Of course, Ann always was a sucker for books, but she had frequently expressed her opinion of books in sets—and people who bought books by the yard.

"Oh, not for us, silly," she said a little impatiently. "For the children. All those bookshelves hungry and aching to be full again since we took all the books ——"

Colin came closer, and examined the books more carefully. Then he smiled a little, and took Ann's two hands in his. He kissed their grubby fingers lightly, and said, "These two hands hold for me all the happiness I can expect in earth or heaven—but, oh my darling, as a molder of youthful minds you leave much to be desired." He began weeding the books out, then, carefully separating the sheep from the

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goats. He took out Balzac and Boccaccio and Rabelais and de Maupassant and the "unexpurgated" Arabian Nights, and Cellini, and Laurence Sterne, and a few others. "The rest you can deliver to the children—they probably won't read them anyway—but we can't take chances with the board of directors. These you can do as you like with—pack them in the attic against their growing up would be the best, I believe. We have them all in our library anyway ——"

"Colin," Ann said, suddenly aghast at the awful thought of damage she might have done, "I've given Susie free run of our library ——"

"Susie?" he said. "Oh, that's all right. Sometimes I think Susie's more grown up than you are. She can read anything she wants to. It wasn't Susie I had in mind."

"Isn't she a darling?" Ann asked, not expecting an answer. "Colin, couldn't we arrange to send her to college? We could afford it, couldn't we?"

"She has to finish high school first," Colin said.

"If they'll ever give her a chance to study!" Ann said indignantly. "They make me so darn mad, working her so hard!"

"You've been doing something about that, haven't you?"

"Well," Ann said, "I do what I can."

Ann packed the books into the back of the car, and drove over to the Home with them. She arranged them on the shelves of the library—breaking up the sets for better effect—stopped to commiserate with Susie on her difficulties with solid geometry, and returned to the house. She wan-

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dered aimlessly a little while, then invaded the library, where Colin was writing on the typewriter. He must be working on a magazine article—his books were composed in longhand. She didn't speak to him, but ran her fingers over a row of books until she found one that suited her mood, then curled up in a big chair, lit a cigarette and composed herself for reading.

Presently she noticed that the clicking of the typewriter keys was becoming more and more spasmodic. She looked up from her book in time to see Colin push back his black and curly forelock with impatient fingers, and rise from his chair. "Darling," he said to Ann, "though I love you to distraction, and would cheerfully lay down my life for you, I can *not* write with you in the room!"

Ann rose hastily, and looked humble and apologetic. "I'm so sorry, Colin," she said. "I thought—when I was so quiet—it wouldn't disturb you."

He looked at her, half-humorously, half-ruefully. "To think I'd let a snip of a girl do this to me! Don't you see, angel—you're there. Disturbing—electrifying—no matter how quietly you sit. I know you're there, and somehow that's all there's room for in my so-called mind. Do you mind, awfully?"

Ann took her book and started to leave the room, then came back to kiss him lightly on the forehead. "I like it, Colin. I hope I always will—disturb you."

Ann was amazingly happy. Colin's active mind kept her on her toes, and she found herself living more mentally than she had since college. Colin had a prodigious memory, and

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was an inveterate quoter. Sometimes he quoted Ann to herself, and she blushed at inanities that she had put into letters less than a year ago. She had been so confoundedly sure of herself—particularly on things that she knew nothing about. Now that she was learning a great deal more about the business of living, she found her young cocksureness singularly trying. Not that Colin held it against her—but it was a sure and effective method of teasing her.

Ann fitted into marriage with Colin very smoothly. Her life ran along so calmly it might almost have been termed monotonous if it weren't so peaceful and deeply satisfying—with moments of blissful rapture. If Ann had thought about it at all, she would have considered it impossible that she ever could find rapture in the arms of a man other than Jock. Colin was gentle and kind and considerate, and had taught her all she knew of love. Perhaps Ann didn't appreciate his kindness. She had known nothing but kindness all her life, and never had anyone hurt her—except Jock. Now she scarcely thought of Jock—except to remember him, a little vaguely, as a part of a life that had once been hers, and had never been quite full. Colin had been wrong—Colin, who was always right—she could separate her life into water-tight compartments and keep it separated.

Their days began late. They didn't possess an alarm clock, and Ann usually awoke between eight and eight-thirty, and slipped into her corduroy pajamas, to go out into the frequently chilly—even in summer—kitchen to start breakfast. Her movements wakened Colin, and while she was preparing breakfast, he would bathe and shave and

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dress, and they would sit down to breakfast together around nine. After breakfast, Colin walked to the post office for the mail, and Ann usually had the dishes washed and put away, and the scanty cleaning the house required daily, finished by the time he returned. They read the mail and the newspaper together, then Colin retired to the library to start his day's work, and Ann had a leisurely bath and dressed. Sometimes she would take a long walk before lunch—other days she would sit in the sunroom and read or knit. Connie had taught her to knit, and Ann enjoyed it. Always she had been quick and clever with her hands, and it went along smoothly for her.

After lunch, Colin would break into his day to dictate to Ann any letters he needed to write, and she typed them for him while he went for an hour's walk. In the afternoon sometimes she went calling, but not often. Summer lingered late that year, and she spent many lazy hours on the terrace, lying in a deck chair with a book or magazine. While it was still warm, she served afternoon tea on the terrace, and then was when they had most of their guests. The women of Port Drake had welcomed Ann to their midst, but somehow she didn't find an intimate friend among them. They were pleasant, but rather unimportant. It was nice to have them there, while she dispensed tea and sandwiches and cookies, and amusing to listen to their chatter. They didn't lionize Colin—he had been around too long to have that sort of importance for Port Drake.

Directly or indirectly, Ann found out what Port Drake thought of her—and of her house. She gathered bits here

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and there—people on the terrace didn't realize how clearly their voices carried to the kitchen, where Ann was fixing sandwiches. Almost unanimously, they thought the house was awfully plain—and so small, for a Drake. And fancy her not having servants. It was unthinkable for a Drake not to have servants. And did you ever see so many books? Maybe it just looked like more, as the house was so much smaller, but they were all over the house—imagine dusting them. Obviously she didn't know what to do with money, though she seemed a nice enough girl. Of course she could do anything she liked with Colin, you had only to look at him to see that. He looked at her as if she were Helen of Troy and Cleopatra and the Queen of Hearts, all rolled into one. Of course Colin wasn't so young any more, but they hadn't thought he'd reached the foolish age yet, though maybe he had. Of course he wasn't the man his father had been—not half. You never would have caught old Michael letting a woman run him that way. It was funny, when she built the house just how she wanted it, that she made it so small. Only one bedroom. Of course that was a very fancy arrangement, having two dressing rooms and two bathrooms off the bedroom—but that was the only extravagant thing in the whole house. Things certainly used to be different. Time was, when you went into the Drake house, you knew it belonged to somebody. But this house—why, anybody could have a plain little house like this. If they wanted it.

Ann told herself that she didn't care. The house was perfect, in her eyes—and Colin seemed happy there. Colin was happy there—he had told her repeatedly that he had

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never been so happy in his life. She didn't see why, just because they could afford it, they should live on a grand scale, when neither of them wanted to. At least she didn't, and Colin had told her often enough that what she wanted, he wanted.

Perhaps the pleasantest afternoons were the ones when there were just the three of them—Susie and Colin and herself. Susie was a darling, and it was fun to have her around. She enjoyed being Susie's mentor—never before had she realized how much she had missed through not having a younger sister. Ann always had been the one to receive instruction and guidance from Connie, and it was fun to pass it on.

As they had afternoon tea daily, dinner was late. At first Colin had been a bit doubtful, and thought he should get a cook, but Ann had been firm. She enjoyed playing around in that charming kitchen, and stoutly declared that being a good cook consisted merely of having a reasonable amount of intelligence and a little imagination. Of course she made mistakes, but not tragic ones, and soon she was doing it as easily as if it always had been her job.

Perhaps that was the reason their marriage ran so smoothly. Ann took it on as if it were a new job, that would employ all her talents, and that it was supremely important she do well. Of course she had Connie's peerless example to guide her, and she determined that she would do Connie credit. Contrary to Mrs. Christmas' dire remarks, Colin was not an exacting man, and seemed sublimely happy to have Ann do anything that she wanted to do. Not yet had she

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said to him, "I love you," for she was resolved never under any circumstances to lie to Colin, but it was easy enough to call him all the conventional pet names, and they served the purpose. When he was holding her close in his arms and whispered, "My darling, I love you so," it was easy to murmur satisfactory little terms of endearment, punctuated by kisses.

The weather turned suddenly cold on the second of October. Ann and Colin were sitting in front of the fireplace, smoking cigarettes and going through the mail. Ann opened Colin's bank statement, and inquired, "Want me to check this for you, Colin? After all, I used to do book-keeping."

"If you don't mind. I've always hated that job."

Ann ran through the checks quickly, separating those written in Colin's small neat hand from her own, covered with large, sprawly writing. As she was arranging his according to the numbers on the checks, one for five hundred dollars payable to Millicent Roberts caught her eye. "Who is Millicent Roberts?" she inquired idly.

Colin put down the paper, and looked across at her. "She was my wife."

"Oh."

Funny to encounter her that way, on a canceled check. Funny she never had known her name before. Then she asked, "Is this alimony?"

Colin nodded.

Something else struck Ann then, and she asked, "Did she

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get her maiden name back?" Rather nice to know that there wasn't another Mrs. Drake, at that.

"No. She's Mrs. Roberts now."

Ann was still looking at the check rather abstractedly. She looked up at him suddenly. "But, Colin, if she's married again, you aren't still paying her alimony, are you? I mean ——"

"Yes, my dear, I'll go on paying her five hundred a month so long as we both shall live. Rather careless of me, perhaps, but there it is."

"Oh, Colin, you spoil your women horribly! I don't mind your paying her this—though it does seem rather a lot—but it's so bad for women to be treated like that!"

"Any complaints, Mrs. Drake?" Colin asked casually, coming over to put his arm around her.

"My dear ——" She stopped in her tirade to kiss him, then went on, still a bit angrily, "Why did she divorce you, Colin?"

"Gross cruelty was the charge, I believe." He was very nonchalant about it, but looked as if he would like to drop the subject.

Ann, however, persisted. "Cruel? You, Colin? How absurd! I mean—you're probably the kindest man who ever lived. How were you cruel to her? Forgive me if I'm being tiresome, but I'd really like to know ——"

"You have every right to. My cruelty—my current cruelty—consisted in not being willing to drop the book I was working on and take her to Europe when the mood suddenly seized her. Some six months earlier she had refused to

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accompany me when I went to England to finish the research on *Bruce*. Oh well, I didn't fight it. I was as ready for a divorce as she. But promise me, Ann—if you ever get a yen to go any place—to Tibet or the Congo or maybe the Isle of Man—you'll tell me, won't you? ”

Ann nodded solemnly. “ I won't get a yen when you're in the middle of a book,” she promised.

“ Dear heart,” Colin said suddenly, “ do you realize that you have practically no winter clothes? ”

“ I have a fur coat,” Ann responded promptly. She hadn't worn it yet, that rich and lovely thing that had been Colin's wedding gift to her. She realized then, that she actually didn't have any clothes that would be appropriate under a mink coat. It had given her a few uneasy qualms when she first received it, but then she had hung it in a cedar closet and promptly forgotten all about it. With the first nip of winter, the thought of its rich warmth was satisfying.

“ You'd better run into Seattle and see what you can find,” Colin suggested. “ I've arranged for you to charge anything you buy at Frederick's and Best's and Magnin's—if you want to buy anything anywhere else, you always can write a check.”

“ Trying to get rid of me,” Ann said sadly. “ You've always gone with me to Seattle before. Do you think you can trust me to pick out my own clothes? ”

“ Darling, I'd trust you to do anything in the world. And I have to write a book.”

Ann stopped at Connie's house on her way in to Seattle, but Connie was giving a luncheon and couldn't accompany

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her on her shopping tour. "Do you s'pose I'd dare leave my guests to shift for themselves?" she asked, then wistfully decided she couldn't. So Ann continued into town alone, and with her usual quickness in decisions involving clothes, bought a dress of coral crepe and a small brown hat that swept off her forehead and gave her a wide-eyed and ingenuous look, in something less than forty-five minutes. She found their prices appalling, but the saleswomen took one look at her coat and automatically brought out their most expensive wares. Ann couldn't very well tell them that never in her life had she paid so much for anything to wear—not even when her father had money. She couldn't let the coat down. And perhaps the thought of that five hundred dollars a month to Millicent Roberts going on and on indefinitely helped a little. At least she was making Colin happy now.

She was leaving the store, and considering where she would go for lunch, when she bumped into Jock. Quite literally—she hadn't been looking where she was going, and ran straight into his arms. It was half a minute before he recognized her, and she had to blink a time or two herself. Then they laughed, and he took her arm and steered her to the edge of the sidewalk.

"What luck, Ann! It's been years. How are you, darling? You'll lunch with me, of course."

Jock was so big. She had forgotten how big he was, and how very handsome. She was wearing brown suede pumps with four-inch heels—it was all right for her to wear high heels when Colin wasn't with her—and still she had to look up to him. All these thoughts ran through her mind, before

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she said, in a voice that was curiously breathless, "Of course I'll have lunch with you. It's so nice to see you, Jock—it's been a long time."

He took her to a funny, smoky little place, dim and candlelit. The candles were thrust into bottles, and years of different colored wax had run down their sides to form an uneven mottled effect. It was a speakeasy, and Ann wondered how it had managed to stay open long enough to burn all those candles. They had a cocktail, and Ann remembered that Jock never had drunk before: that was why she seldom drank anything—she'd never been with a man who drank, until Colin taught her; and she thought confusedly that she ought to ask him how Nina was, and wondered why he didn't mention Colin, and somehow the only clear thought in her mind was that it was Jock sitting there across the table from her, just like old times. . . .

"Aren't you thinner, Ann?" Jock asked as he held a match to her cigarette. "You look thinner . . . rather as if you'd grown up. You look like a million dollars, though," he added hastily.

"About seven thousand as I stand," Ann replied, and somehow it didn't sound light and humorous as she had meant it to. It sounded rather horrid.

"Yeah. We've both of us sold out, haven't we?" he stated.

Ann wanted to protest, wildly. It wasn't like that at all. Somehow she couldn't find the right words, and before she could say anything he went on.

"I don't want to talk about that," he said quickly. "Is

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there any way we can go back to what we had before, Ann?"

She looked at him. Even in the dim light of the candle, she could see fine lines in his face. He was thinner, too, and his face looked drawn and haggard. It was Jock, of course, but somehow there seemed to be a stranger inhabiting that familiar body. Then she met his eyes, and felt a little dizzy. No, it wasn't a stranger. . . .

"Let's get out of here," Jock said abruptly.

Automatically, Ann followed him. She didn't seem to have any will of her own. She might be a puppet, or a ventriloquist's dummy. No, just a puppet. She couldn't find anything to say, her own words or anyone else's.

She went along meekly with him, and got into his car. A very nice car, quite new. Neither of them said anything more until they were out in the country. They turned off the highway, then, and plunged down the road that led to the Sound. He was driving very fast. He pulled up on a cliff overlooking the Sound, and stopped the car. Then his arms were around her, and he said in a voice that sounded strained and hard, "Oh, what fools we've been! How could we kid ourselves into thinking there ever could be anyone else? Oh, Ann ——"

But, still automatically, she pulled away from him and avoided his lips. "No, Jock," she said, a little wildly. "It's no good—any of it. We can't do things like this. Not *us*, Jock." If it had been anyone else, she would have been shocked and hurt. She couldn't be shocked or hurt at Jock's

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making love to her. She wouldn't let him, of course, but it wasn't vulgar, because it was Jock.

"Ann, I love you. I've always loved you ——"

Some small demon that seemed to be no part of her caused Ann to murmur, "' Perhaps it was right to dissemble your love, but—*why* did you kick me downstairs?' "

Jock, whose association with Colin had been very casual and had not taught him an easy facility in quotation, looked a little puzzled. "What do you mean, Ann?"

Ann shrugged, and slid into the far corner of the seat. She leaned back, then, and, looking at Jock speculatively, quoted again. "' O God, that I had loved a smaller man! I should have found in him a greater heart.' "

Jock looked still more puzzled. "I don't know you when you're like this, Ann. What do you mean? Don't be hard and sophisticated—it isn't you."

"It may not be me, Jock, but—it helps. Oh yes, it helps! Do you have a cigarette?"

He gave her one, and held his lighter for her.

Before he could speak again, Ann continued. "Drive me back to town, will you, Jock? I can only stand so much of this sort of thing, and I think I've had my quota for today."

Jock was angry, but he started the car, and didn't speak all the way back to town. Ann's left hand, that held her cigarette, made gestures while she talked, lightly and amusingly. Jock couldn't see her other hand, buried in the folds of her coat. Tightly clenched, its nails cut little grooves into her palm.

She had gotten herself well under control by the time

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they were downtown. She even could be gay, and she shook hands with him and said, "Thanks so much, Mr. Hamilton. It's been charming—and most instructive."

She went into a store then, and bought three pairs of shoes with low heels. She looked a little ruefully at her high-heeled pumps, and said quickly, "You can send these to the Good Will." Maybe low heels looked silly with a mink coat. What if they did. It was somehow compensation to Colin—when she returned she'd be shorter than he was.

The long drive back to Port Drake was difficult. She drove fast, but it didn't keep her from thinking. The nagging conviction that she was being unfair to Colin, even seeing Jock—she never should have agreed to have lunch with him—returned to her mind, no matter how she directed her thoughts.

As she drove up beside the house, Colin ran out to meet her. She slid over, and he got in beside her to take the car into the garage. "Hi, beautiful," he said. "Have you an elegant new wardrobe? What I can see of it looks grand."

"That's all there is," Ann admitted sadly. "One dress and one hat and three pairs of shoes."

"You didn't do so well, did you?" he asked. "Need me along to make you accomplish anything, don't you?"

"Oh, yes," Ann breathed fervently. "I do need you, Colin. So very much."

He looked a little surprised, but put his arm around her as they went into the house. "Dinner is practically ready—I shoved the steak under the broiler when I saw your lights turn up the hill—hope you'll like it."

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Ann sniffed. "It smells wonderful!" She remembered suddenly that she had had nothing but a cocktail for lunch, and, relieved, decided that the horrible emptiness she felt had nothing to do with Jock. She just needed a little food.

There was a thick broiled steak and shoestring potatoes and a green salad, and coffee, black and strong and fragrant. Ann ate and drank gratefully, and finally leaned back in her chair and looked across the table at Colin. He cocked an eyebrow at her, and smiled a little.

"Gosh, you're nice, Colin," she said contentedly.

11

ONE DAY ANN MET HER BEST FRIEND AND HER SEVEREST critic in Port Drake. But, legend to the contrary, they were two different people.

She was browsing around in Miss Sallie Porter's circulating library, looking for something light but tasty—something that she wouldn't want to buy (although it was rather difficult to find books that Ann wouldn't want to buy) but would enjoy reading. She was hesitating between a lurid pseudo-scientific book, that came under the general head of "Mystery and Detective" and what promised to be an equally lurid love story. She would have chosen the first unhesitatingly, because she knew what Colin's reaction to the second would be, but the author of it had written so many books she had read, with so few distinguishing characteristics, that she didn't know for certain that she hadn't already read it. They were an unfortunate selection for Mrs. Bedelle to find in her hands, she thought later. If she had known who it was entering the little shop, she might at least have been contemplating something rather more edifying.

Further, she had just put both books in her lap, and was

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lighting a cigarette to aid cerebration, when Mrs. Bedelle came in. But how was Ann to know that she was someone important? She naturally assumed that anyone of importance in Port Drake already had called on her. And she wasn't particularly impressed at that. Miss Sallie looked fussed, and seemed at a loss as to who should be introduced to whom. She finally murmured both names, so rapidly it was difficult to tell which came first. Ann put down her cigarette, and moved the books onto a table, rose and extended her hand. "How do you do?" she said.

Mrs. Bedelle sniffed once, murmured vaguely, and proffered a limp hand. Then she dismissed Ann from notice, and began talking to Miss Sallie. Ann watched her, picked up her cigarette, and leaned back in her chair. "I thought you didn't allow smoking in here," Mrs. Bedelle said sharply.

"Excuse me!" Ann exclaimed, and carefully extinguished her cigarette. "Why didn't you tell me, Miss Sallie? I haven't knowingly broken rules since leaving college."

Miss Sallie blushed, and murmured, "It's all right, Mrs. Drake—I don't mind—but some of our customers——" Her voice trailed off uncertainly.

Apparently Ann's name hadn't penetrated Mrs. Bedelle's consciousness before. She turned sharply and said, "Mrs. Drake?"

"Mrs. Colin Drake," Ann acknowledged, and though she didn't exactly expect her to get down and worship, Port Drake had led her to expect a little respect at the mention of her name. She was disappointed.

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Ann regarded Mrs. Bedelle gravely, and wondered why Miss Sallie seemed so concerned about her. She was a rather sharp-featured woman—disagreeable looking, she decided promptly. Her mouth turned down at the corners. She had red-brown hair, and no flair for clothes. Further, she was hippy. Ann felt slim and young and happily superior. "Perhaps you know my husband," she said. A stupid remark, in Port Drake. But not so stupid, perhaps, as Mrs. Bedelle hadn't called.

"Yes," said Mrs. Bedelle, and her thin lips drew together. "Millicent is my most intimate friend," she added.

"Oh," said Ann. It wasn't an adequate answer, but none she had handy at the moment seemed any more so. She waited apprehensively for the next remark, but she needn't have feared, because she was dismissed. Mrs. Bedelle turned to Miss Sallie then, and delivered herself of a tirade on the lack of restrictions in Miss Sallie's library. Any child could come in and get any book he wanted. Either she must stop stocking some, or they should be limited to readers over twenty-one. She was coming to Miss Sallie as a friend and patroness, rather than taking it up with the Town Council.

Ann had a good deal she wanted to say, but it seemed none of her business. As Colin had told her, she left much to be desired as a molder of youthful minds. When she got up to leave, she said, "I may be in later, Miss Sallie. I won't take anything now. I'm glad to have met you, Mrs. Bedelle," and made her escape, marveling a little at the black lies social consciousness imposed on one.

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She saw it was lunch-time, and as Colin had gone to Seattle, she thought she'd lunch in town. A drug-store looked sufficiently inviting, and she went inside and sat at the counter. "Combination salad and black coffee," she ordered, and watched a pretty young woman and four small children who were coming in the door. The woman was tall and slim, with a fresh complexion and long, straight black hair, parted in the middle and drawn into a bun at the nape of her neck. She was, Ann decided, not merely pretty—she was startlingly beautiful. She arranged the children on stools between herself and Ann, from the eldest next Ann to the youngest next herself. They were pretty children, with clean rosy faces and halos of pale gold ringlets, dressed in dark blue linen with white Peter Pan collars. When the young woman had settled a slight difference of opinion between her brood and herself, and changed the order from hot dogs and orange pop to peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, chocolate milk and ice cream, she smiled across the row of golden heads at Ann. "Don't think I'm losing my mind," she begged. "I'm not in the habit of doing this—it's just that our floors are being done over, and it seemed the simplest thing to take them out to lunch."

"They're darlings," Ann said warmly. "Are they all yours?"

"Hey—no emphasis on that 'all'!" she retorted. "Yes they are, and don't look at their coloring so suspiciously. Their father is conspicuously blond."

"I like blond babies best—my little niece is about that same coloring. What are they called?"

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"From you to me—Alan and Barbara and Colin and Dot."

"Dot?" Ann repeated. It seemed sort of prosaic, after the other names.

"Dot," she repeated firmly. "Dot meaning period—full stop—finish. Slightly abecedarian, but if finances hadn't interfered we probably would have gone straight through the alphabet to Ysabel and—what does begin with 'Z'?"

"Zero," Ann was helpful. "How old are they?"

"Six, five, four and three, and about all even the smartest young matron can handle. Though my friends would obligingly inform you that no *smart* young matron has four children in as many years, and I can't convince them that it was with malice aforethought."

"My brother's name is Alan."

"They aren't named after anyone—just names I liked beginning with A, B, etc. Of course people maliciously informed us that it wouldn't do any good naming Colin after the big boss, because he'd never even notice. We didn't—I really did it to spite Cornelia Otis Skinner—have you read 'Tiny Garments'? If I'd gotten as far as M, I would have had a Michael too. I adore her, of course, but I wouldn't have her telling me what I couldn't name my children—I'm Joan Warren, incidentally."

"May I call you Joan?" Ann asked impulsively. "In spite of your impressive family, you seem the first person of my own generation I've met in Port Drake. And how I appreciate you after being put firmly in my place in the lending library just now!"

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"Oh—Beulah," Joan said, shrugging. "We saw her as we came by. Pay no attention—she has delusions of grandeur and occasionally confuses herself with God. But who are you, if it's any of my business?"

"Oh, I'm sorry—I'm Ann Drake, and I hope I'll be seeing a lot of ——" Ann broke off, before the frank horror in Joan's face.

"My glory, you're the big boss's wife! Oh gosh, forget what I said, will you?" Joan bit her lip, and looked at Ann imploringly. "I knew he'd brought his bride here to live, of course, but I had no idea she'd be so young—and—and human."

Ann grinned at her. "You don't know Colin, do you?"

"Of course I know him," Joan said indignantly. "Stan is quite an important executive of the Drake Line. He's been after me to call on you, but you know the way it is ——" She gestured sweepingly over the heads of her children. "I don't go in for society," she added.

"Nor do I," Ann said. "Perhaps it's just as well if the lady I met this morning is the arbiter. Somehow, she didn't seem to respond to my fresh and girlish charm."

"Dear Beulah," Joan murmured. "No one likes her—but she's got 'em buffaloesd. Or maybe Skippy likes her, though it seems incredible. He's a lamb, and everyone loves him ——"

"Who is Skippy?"

"Her husband. It's short for Skipper—everyone called him that until Stan came along and changed it to Skippy, on account of he adored the Lawrenceville stories in the

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days of his youth. He's Stan's boss. Stan's my husband. But you were saying something about Beulah being social arbiter—Mrs. Colin Drake is that, whether she goes in for society or not, and don't let Beulah kid you."

"She told me that Colin's former wife is her most intimate friend," Ann said diffidently.

Joan snorted. "Don't you believe it. Beulah would have liked to have been, that's all. She's—well—she doesn't believe in divorce, and has aired her views rather freely that you and Mr. Drake are—um, I guess I should remember the widely quoted saying about little pitchers. You get my point—— Of course she doesn't go on to say that Millicent is too, but she never was noted for her logic."

"Dr. MacDougal doesn't think so—he married us," Ann said. "And somehow I value his opinion rather more than Mrs. Bedelle's."

Small Alan, beside her, downed the last bit of ice cream and set his spoon down carefully. He turned and looked at Ann, his eyes large and questioning. "What," he demanded, "are you talking about?"

Ann smiled at him. "Hi, fella," she said. "I didn't know you could talk, you've been so quiet."

"I don't talk with my mouth full," he rebuked her gravely.

"Every evidence of a proper upbringing," Ann agreed solemnly. "Do you suppose you could bring your mother over to see me sometime?"

Alan, apparently, had a literal mind. "No," he said, after considering it carefully, "because I'm not allowed to drive

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yet. But I'll speak to her about bringing *me* over. It's a little hard on account of the children's naps, but if we could come in the morning ——"

Ann, with difficulty, refrained from hugging him. Small Alan was exactly like her father.

"I hope we'll be good friends, Alan," she said gravely.

"I'm sure we will be very good friends," he said, after considering her carefully. He took Barbara's hand, and she slid off her stool and looked inquiring. "This is my friend Barbara," Alan said to Ann. "She is my sister too, but she is my very good friend. Isn't she, Mother?"

"Yes, bless you—you don't fight at all," Joan agreed.

"Joan," Barbara said, "I could eat some more ice cream—*easy*."

Joan said "No," gently but firmly, and ignoring her further protests turned her attention to Ann. "Alan is the only stickler for the proprieties in the family. He calls me 'Mother' so meticulously and consistently that he's got Stan doing it—and every time Stan calls me 'Mother' he has to buy me a present to keep me from leaving him, so it's working out quite well. I have to get these youngsters home and put 'em away for a couple hours—I never love them quite so much as when they're just bedded down for their naps. Could you come with me? Or would you be bored?"

Ann wouldn't, and said so with emphasis, so after bundling the four youngsters into the back seat of the car, she climbed in beside Joan in front. She screwed around and watched the children. "Let's see, now—I know Alan and

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Barbara. What's your name, me fine lad?" she asked, poking Colin's foot.

"Lyn," he announced firmly.

"It's Colin, isn't it?" she coaxed.

"Lyn," he insisted, and retired to the corner.

"A laconic young man," Ann remarked to Joan.

"Somebody will have to be, in this family. Neither Stan nor I ever stop talking unless put under pressure, and Alan shows marked tendencies to verbosity already. But when you really want to hear something, let Dot get going. She talks practically pure Chinese so far, but the kids understand her and obligingly interpret. And she's like one of those awful electric phonographs where you don't have to change the records, but that go on and on like Tennyson's brook ——"

"Dot," said that young lady complacently. "Joan?" and then lapsed into a fluent rendering of what was obviously a foreign tongue. Joan glanced into the mirror above her head, and said to Ann, "It's a funny story—I can tell by the expression on her face. I'm afraid she's going to be a raconteur. I only hope she'll learn English, because it's so much pleasanter being bored by someone you can understand."

The Warren home was a pleasant, rambling place, of no particular period of design. The rooms were large and livable and lived-in, and even the piled-up furniture and workmen about couldn't disguise that fact. Joan was blissfully unapologetic for her house. She had told Ann the floors were being done over, and Ann still had wanted to

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come out, so she felt no apologies necessary. After putting the children to bed, they curled up in the window-seat in the master bedroom, overlooking the Sound, and lit cigarettes.

"How old are you, Joan?" Ann asked impulsively, then added, "I'm sorry. I didn't really mean to be impertinent."

"Dear child, I'm not ashamed of my age. Rather proud of it, in fact. I'm twenty-eight. I was graduated from the University when I was twenty-two. Stan and I had been married for six months then, and Alan was on the way, but I was determined to get my degree. To prove to myself and the world that I was a domestic science expert, you see. I've been proving it ever since."

"And I'm going on twenty-five myself. I'd better get going on a family, hadn't I?"

Joan studied her cigarette. "It's not a bad idea," she admitted. She looked steadily at Ann, then, with wide clear grey eyes, black-fringed.

Ann met her gaze without moving. "Do I pass?" she asked finally.

Joan laughed abruptly.

"Having taken down my back hair and told all to the boss's wife, it'd be pretty impertinent of me to say anything but yes, wouldn't it?"

"That," Ann said, "is the only thing I don't like about you, Joan. That 'boss's wife' stuff — Colin isn't active in any part of the business—he's merely a nominal head, not one-tenth as important in the actual running as your

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Stan—whatever it is your Stan does. But he's a very nice person and I like him."

"I do too," Joan admitted, "though I scarcely know him and he petrifies me. There's no one in the world whose good opinion I would value more—and that I'm less likely to get."

"If I like you, you have his good opinion," Ann assured her. "And I do—so you have arrived, my gal. We should have met earlier."

Joan grinned impishly.

"I would have phoned you the day you arrived in town," she said, "if I'd only known. But wait till you have four children, and you'll see for yourself how rare peaceful hours are."

"Four!" Ann said, startled. "I thought maybe two—a boy and a girl——"

"Sissy!" Joan said scornfully, "with all the money you have—oh, oh—boner again. Sorry—this seems to be my day to pull howlers. I'm given to them all the time, as a matter of fact—don't let that modest little 'my day' deceive you into thinking it's a semi-occasional occurrence——"

When Colin got home that night, Ann was radiant. "I've found a friend in town, Colin—I can call her that already, although I've only known her today."

"Who?"

"Joan Warren—AND her four bright and beautiful youngsters."

"She has a bright and beautiful husband, too," Colin said. "I'm given to understand he is very valuable to the

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Drake Line. I'm glad you've found a friend, my darling—you haven't seemed to take much to local talent so far."

"She's real—and admirable—and altogether swell. I'm *so* glad I've met her." She was so pleased with Joan, she quite forgot to tell Colin of her less pleasant meeting of the day.

12

ANN ADORED JOAN, BUT DIDN'T SEE MUCH OF HER. THE Warrens lived ten miles away, on the other side of Port Drake, and Joan was chronically rushed to death. She met Stan, and found him pleasant, but not the kindred soul Joan was. Stan was large and blond, and looked so much like Jock, though obviously made of much sterner stuff, that Ann found herself being absurdly ashamed of Jock, and defiantly defensive of him, if only to herself.

Occasionally they went to church. Colin and Dr. James MacDougal, whom Colin called alternately Jamie and Padre, were close friends. Dr. MacDougal, though reared the strictest of Scotch Presbyterians, did not seem disturbed at Colin's second marriage. Ann somewhat cynically remarked that she didn't know whether this was due to a broader mind than that possessed by Beulah Bedelle, or merely an acute consciousness that Colin personally paid half his salary. Ann liked Dr. MacDougal's sermons, but found them not a sufficient reason for going to church, so long as Mrs. Bedelle was soloist and choir director. "She hasn't a very sympathetic voice, has she?" Ann said. "She's not a very sympathetic person," Colin retorted.

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Mrs. Bedelle wasn't, to say the least. Also, she seemed to have an exceptionally poor memory. She was introduced to Ann a half dozen times or more, but it never seemed to make any impression on her. Ann was furious, but swallowed her fury, and resolved not to descend to the level of a feud with her. After the first time, she didn't make the mistake of saying "We've met." She said, "How do you do," coolly, and didn't proffer a hand. She was a little curious about what Mrs. Bedelle said behind her back, but Joan didn't get around enough to hear, and no one else in Port Drake was on sufficiently intimate terms with Ann to report on it. Even Susie didn't pick up much any more. Susie was known to spend too much time in Ann's company—and was also, of course, no longer so readily available as spare time maid.

Ann met Skippy, too, and was enchanted by him. He was a big, dark, good-looking man, jovial and essentially naive. She felt immediately that the liking was mutual, but as she had already earned his wife's enmity without trying, it seemed better to leave bad enough alone and not encourage Skippy's friendship. Ann felt, anyway, that even if she were deprived of all companionship save Colin's she still would be content in Port Drake.

Ann was passing by on the outside of the library window, when she saw Colin pick up a fistful of manuscript and throw it across the room. As it wasn't held together at all, it wasn't a successful gesture of rage, but fluttered messily about the floor. The action was so unlike him that she hurried inside.

She paused in the door of the library, and looked at him.

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He was patiently gathering up the pages, and seemed perfectly calm. "Anything I can do?" she inquired.

He looked up, grinned and dropped his papers to extend his hands in a gesture of invitation. She came over and dropped to the floor beside him, where she nestled into his waiting arms. "Happy, Ann?" he asked after a little while.

She nodded, and turned her head a little to kiss the end of his chin.

"How would you like to go to Hawaii?"

"Right now?" she asked, a little lazily. She was rather enjoying the crisp fall weather, and tropic shores held no special allure.

"You know, we never had a honeymoon. And the book that seemed so all important to me at the time has turned out to be the most awful lot of tripe that ever was set down on paper. So I just thought——"

"But Colin—you know I didn't want a honeymoon. I wanted a chance to get acquainted with you in our normal surroundings. I think honeymoons should always come later. It would make things easier for the people involved."

"Did you need to have something make things easier? . . . You needn't answer that, Ann. It was damned impertinent——"

"Silly——" Ann said softly. "I had *you*." Then, in sudden alarm, "Colin, what makes you think your book is tripe? It couldn't be——"

"Remember, my darling, I sometimes review books. And the review I'd hand this one would ignite the paper it was

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written on. So I'm taking a vacation, starting at once. How would you like to do some rambling about with me? I suppose it might be well to show you the sources of our income ——"

"You mean show me your manuscripts?" Ann asked.

Colin whooped. "Bless your innocent heart. In spite of your rather touching faith in me, they don't run to mink coats and such like. I mean the Drake timberlands, and the mills and the ships. Theoretically I'm the head of the Drake enterprises. Actually, it will be more or less exploring for me, too."

For a week they expored. Ann was a little bewildered by the vastness of it all. They drove through miles of timber, and looked at sawmills rather unintelligently, and looked at ships and models of ships of the Drake Line. Everywhere they went they encountered men she had met in social capacities, and began to understand for the first time why the Port Drake matrons treated Colin with unliionizing respect. Colin Drake wasn't an author to them. He was the Big Boss, on whose whims the very bread and butter their husbands earned might depend. Joan hadn't been fooling.

At the end of the week, Ann heaved a sigh of relief. "Let's go to Seattle for a vacation now, Colin," she suggested.

Colin grinned at her. "It isn't getting you down a little bit, is it?"

Ann breathed deeply. "What I can't understand is why—with all the makings of a big business man—you were strong-minded enough not to be one."

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"It was completely selfish," Colin explained. "The business—the businesses—were handed to me on a silver platter, well garnished. And I said it was spinach——"

"And you said the hell with it," Ann supplied automatically.

"Exactly. I'm the big stockholder, of course, and supposedly I have something to say about how things are run, but actually I leave it up to the men who are better qualified than I to run it. I never had any head for business at all, and what few talents I have run to putting words on paper. I suppose I'm a throwback to a ballad-maker of an earlier day, or something. Whatever it is, I gratefully receive the dividends, endeavor to see that all the employees are adequately paid, and call it a day. If I try any active running of the business, I immediately am put in my place by a few well-chosen words. So now you know as much about the Drake enterprises as I do myself—and what have you got to say?"

"I still like your books," Ann said promptly.

Colin laughed, and began to drag suitcases out of the closet, preparatory to going to Seattle.

As he helped Ann pack, Colin asked, "Are you sure you'd rather go to Seattle? I can't say for sure how long this mood of laziness will be on me, you know, and if we were off for Hawaii you'd be more sure of your vacation."

"I think we've been provincial long enough," Ann said. "A little city life will do us both a world of good."

"Seattle should be grateful for the compliment. I've heard that it was considered pretty provincial."

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"By experts, no doubt. But I'm no expert."

It was fun living in a hotel—Ann never had, before. It was fun looking up old school friends and inviting them to lunch with her—and more fun to be grand and impressive as Mrs. Colin Drake. Ann was very careful to choose the more literary of her friends, so her casual references to Colin and his books would not be lost. It was fun dropping into bookstores where she had spent countless hours as an intelligent but undistinguished buyer, and have Colin introduce her to the attendants who fell on him with loud glad cries, and find herself treated with a respect that was still new to her.

Their last night in town—although Ann had no idea it would be their last night, when they started out—they met Connie and Davey at a dine and dance spot north of the city. Ann, with more new clothes than she knew what to do with, had changed her mind three times about what dress she would wear, and ended up by wearing the dusty-pink dress she had had for Jock's wedding—because Colin was a bit sentimental about it, as it was the dress she was wearing when he first met her. So they were rather late in arriving, and found Nina and Jock at the table with Connie and Davey. Connie and Davey were just getting up to dance. They paused to greet them, and Davey informed them that dinner had been ordered, and Nina and Jock had joined them, wasn't that nice?

Ann smiled at Nina, who had bobbed her hair and was wearing it rather long, and curled at the ends. She decided she was just another pretty girl, instead of being the dis-

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tinguished beauty she had been with long hair. Nina looked up at Colin, and said, "Dance with me? Ann won't mind ——"

"Might I point out that you have a perfectly good husband?" Davey demanded.

"Oh, I won't dance with Jock—he's doing his animal imitations again tonight," Nina said carelessly, her hand on Colin's arm.

Ann sat down rather hastily, and smiled at Colin. The orchestra started to play, and Ann said, "Do you have a cigarette, Jock? I'm losing my mind or something—or anyway my cigarettes ——"

"Forgive me," Jock said, proffering his case—a slender gold one, Ann noted, and remembered the crumpled packs he used to carry.

"What did Nina mean, Jock?"

"Huh? Oh . . . pig and bear, chiefly, I imagine—also gander and mule, probably."

Ann didn't say anything. She stirred a little in her chair, restlessly. What did one talk about to the man one had been in love with for years? Your wife should have left her hair long, she looks a little chichi, isn't the orchestra divine, how's your love life, and don't you think I look elegant in the old sackcloth I was wearing on the day you broke my heart?

"Want to dance?" Jock asked.

She weighed the two possibilities, both undesirable. Still, it would probably be easier to retain what little sanity she had left if she wasn't in his arms. "No thank you." Do you

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ever think about me when I'm not there, how do you like being married to a wealthy girl, aren't you ever nice and silly and to hell with the consequences any more?

"I suppose," Jock began, a little diffidently, "that I'd better ask your forgiveness for the other day, Ann. I did act like an awful ass, I guess—but Nina and I had been having a row for a couple days on end, and I guess I'd been drinking more than was good for me ——"

"That was all right," Ann said awkwardly. That was all right, that was just ducky, I thought you meant it was all, haven't you any tact at all you utter idiot, oh my heavens, Jock, damn your beautiful face, what is wrong with us?

And then the others were returning to the table; and the awful nightmarish quality left, and she was laughing and talking as if she were perfectly normal. Maybe she was perfectly normal, maybe that was what life was like, going along all nice and smooth and perfect and suddenly exploding a bombshell in your face. Between the cocktail and the soup she danced with Colin, and he didn't talk at all and she was deeply grateful. Between the soup and the salad she danced with Davey, and he said, "Sorry as hell, Ann. It wasn't our idea. But they came in and Nina saw us and—well, it just developed into a party."

"I know it's not your fault, Davey," she smiled at him, painfully.

When she danced with Jock later, she felt like a too tightly strung violin. "Relax, darlin'," he murmured into her ear, and then, with seeming diabolic intent the lights were dimmed, and Jock bent a little and pressed his cheek

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against hers, and she shut her eyes and listened to her heart-beats. Then Jock said, "Let's go outside, Ann," and Ann, so sensibly she could scarcely believe it was she who was talking, answered, "Let's go back to the table."

All in all, the evening was not an unqualified success. Driving back to the hotel, through the night that was crisp and cold and very dark, Ann huddled low in the seat, the big collar of her coat around her ears. She sat close to Colin, but he kept both hands on the wheel until Ann said wistfully, "Won't you even hold my hand, Colin?"

He looked at her swiftly, then took her hand in his. Ann wanted to cry.

He took her up to their room, then said, "I'm going downstairs and have a drink, Ann. Do you want anything before I go?"

Ann said no, and watched the door close behind him with a sense of bereavement. She wanted him—she wanted his arms around her, and the comforting assurance of his love. She felt alone and unwanted and singularly unattractive. Colin might have asked her if *she* didn't want a drink. She never in her life had wanted one so badly. As a matter of fact, she never before had felt she needed one at all.

Ann felt more and more badly treated as she slowly got ready for bed and Colin didn't return. She tried to read for a while after she was in bed, but the words didn't make sense. Finally she turned out the light, and began to cry, very quietly. It was with the awful blackness of despair that she faced the future. She had believed so surely that by shutting her eyes to something, it would become unreal. She

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felt childishly frustrated because she couldn't say to herself, "I don't love Jock any more," and evolve the minor miracle of making it true. She had seen for herself that Jock wasn't wholly admirable, but it made him no less desirable. His touch still could turn her very bones to water.

She got up, then, and found herself a cigarette. She lit it, and walked over to the window, and stood there looking down on Fourth Avenue, almost deserted at this hour of the morning. Where was Colin? Reason told her that he wasn't the type to get drunk because his wife had met her love again, and besides, bars didn't stay open all night, or did they? Ann really didn't know very much about bars, except that there weren't supposed to be any in Seattle. Colin must be at his club.

She heard him open the door then, and turned to see him silhouetted in the light from the hall. He crossed the room swiftly and took hold of both her arms. "You're frozen, Ann!" he said sharply. "Get into your bed this minute."

Obediently, Ann moved toward the further twin bed. "I thought you weren't coming back," she said.

He caught the note of terror in her voice, and held her close for a moment before pulling the covers over her and tucking them in. "Good night, darling," he said softly, and kissed her gently on the forehead.

So the next morning they packed up and returned to Port Drake. They didn't even discuss it. They had breakfast sent up to the room, and afterward they both started packing. Colin was unusually silent, and Ann felt an urgent need to

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get him back to the old familiar background of their own house, where he wouldn't seem quite such a stranger to her.

They stopped and had lunch with Connie, and played with Betsey for a while afterward. Then she was packed off to take her nap, and they said goodbye to Connie and went on. All the way to Port Drake a couplet ran through Ann's head with maddening persistency:

“ 'Tis well to be off with the old love
Before you are on with the new.”

Dear God, what had she let herself in for?

And then they picked up Susie, who was trudging home from school, a block from the house, and took her home with them, and Colin started the oil-burner, and built a roaring fire in the fireplace, and Ann made tea, and Susie made cinnamon toast, and they laughed and talked quite like old times. And then Susie left, and Ann stretched out on the davenport, and Colin came and sat beside her and held a match to her cigarette, and suddenly everything was all right again. Ann reached up and pulled Colin down beside her. She nuzzled his face gently, and murmured, “You need a shave, rather,” and he said, “I'll shave before dinner, honey—I don't want to scratch you,” and Ann sighed softly and said, “Oh, Colin, it's so lovely to be home again.”

“Isn't it?” he said, and held her a little closer.

The months slipped by, almost unnoticeably. Ann invited

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her family up for Thanksgiving, and gloried in the success of her first big culinary attempt. She had much gratuitous advice from Mrs. Christmas, of course, and a good deal of assistance from Susie, who was an excellent cook, having served as cook's assistant for a good many of her orphan years. Susie was a guest, too, and sparkled and shone at her first family party.

Christmas they spent with Connie and Davey, who had shortly before moved into a larger house. Alan was there for Christmas too, and came up to Port Drake to spend the following week with Ann and Colin. He slept in the living room and swore that he was acquiring the figure of a half-open jackknife from sleeping at right-angles on the two studio coaches. Ann had no patience with that—she insisted that there was no need for it; what difference would it make if he did hang over a few inches?

Ann decided she didn't want to attend a party on New Year's Eve. She arranged for Susie to come over, and promised solemnly to return her to the Home at five minutes after midnight. She shooed Colin and Alan away, and went into a huddle with Susie in the bedroom. "You really should be all grown-up tonight, duck," she decided. "I know you haven't any grown-up clothes, so I thought we'd fix something of mine for you—I don't know, though, you're pretty little ——"

"I could baste up a hem in one that wouldn't hurt a bit—I'd press it out for you tomorrow so it would be all right," Susie said, her brown eyes shining.

"I wasn't thinking of the length so much—I was think-

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ing of your filling out the top of it," Ann said, looking at Susie's thin body.

She finally found an informal with short puffed sleeves and a full shirred bodice, a cocktail-length dress on Ann that became a long dress on Susie. Ann had hired a woman to cook and serve the dinner, so she could devote her time to getting herself and Susie ready. She dressed rather hastily herself, in white transparent velvet, cut low in back, and with short sleeves and a long sweeping skirt, and observed that as usual when she wasn't putting her mind on it, she looked very nice. Ann brushed Susie's brown hair, and tied a silver ribbon Alice-in-Wonderland fashion around her head. She hunted up a box of suntan powder that she had used in the summer, and toned down Susie's freckles by a judicious use of it. She even added a touch of rouge and a hint of lipstick, and stood back, well pleased with her handiwork.

Susie regarded herself with awe in the mirror. "I don't believe it's me," she whispered. "Oh, Mrs. Drake, I feel just like Cinderella ——"

"We'll give you five minutes after the stroke of midnight, seeing that it's New Year's," Ann laughed. "Now we'd better get out of here and give our men a chance to make themselves beautiful for us."

Colin and Alan were gratifyingly complimentary to Susie. When they reappeared, in dinner jackets, Susie's cup was full. She was so sublimely happy, she actually couldn't talk, and at dinner turned from one to the other, her big eyes shining and happy.

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After dinner they turned on the radio and danced. The men made quite a point of dancing with Susie, and she smiled and talked with them, and even flirted a little. "The girl's going to be all right," Colin said to Ann, watching her.

"She's a darling, isn't she, Colin? I'm enjoying this party so much."

Colin's arm tightened around her. "I have everything I need to make a party right here," he assured her.

When Alan returned from taking Susie home, he confessed, "I kissed the duck good night, and I'm afraid she took it as a romantic gesture—and has me in mind for a Daddy-Long-Legs."

"That's all right," Ann assured him. "It's good for a girl to have a big romantic interest. It's always the one who loves who has the most fun, anyway—it's much more fun to love than to be loved ——"

"Do you think so, Ann?" Colin asked seriously.

Ann suddenly realized the implications of what she had said, and amended it hastily. "I read it some place and it sounded so well I had to repeat it," she explained. "Now that the juvenile element has gone, don't you think a New Year's party should have a little liquid refreshment?"

She curled up on the couch beside Alan, while Colin was mixing drinks. He put his hand under the curls at the nape of her neck, and turned her face around toward him. "How you getting along, kid?" he asked.

"All right," Ann answered noncommittally. "It's only—oh, it's all so easy, Alan. It doesn't seem to have much point

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when there's never a struggle for anything. I only have to express a whim for something, and Colin sees that I get it. And somehow it makes me seem just a little—well, unimportant.”

Alan laughed at her. “Most women get the idea they’re unimportant only if their every whim isn’t gratified,” he said.

Colin came and put tall glasses in their hands. Ann looked at him accusingly and said, “You haven’t kissed me once this year, Colin.”

He leaned over her as she sat looking up at him, and fastened her lips with his. Then he said, “A dreadful oversight. I’ll have my secretary make a note of it so that I’ll do it regularly in the future.”

Alan raised his glass. “To two of my very favorite people,” he said.

13

TOWARD THE LAST OF JANUARY, COLIN BROUGHT HOME A puppy for Ann—a white wire-hair with blond spots and a circle of black around one eye. Ann was enchanted, and promptly named him Lord Peter Wimsey, over Colin's protest.

"But don't you see the resemblance, Colin? He looks just like him."

"I'm really not much of an authority on Lord Peter's looks."

"You like him, don't you?" Ann said accusingly.

"Sayers writes top-notch mysteries, but I can't quite work myself up to the exalted passion you have for her hero. Besides, Ann—you can't call a dog Lord Peter Wimsey. How are you going to call him for supper, for instance? 'Here, Lord Peter Wimsey, here, Lord Peter Wimsey ———'"

Ann hadn't thought of that. "We'll call him Whiffles for short," she decided.

So the dog alternated between the dignity of Lord Peter Wimsey and the indignity of Whiffles. Ann usually called him Whiffles to his face, but went all dignified and referred

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to him as Lord Peter Wimsey to other people, and rather electrified staid callers with a casual remark to the effect that in spite of all Colin could do, when it was cold Lord Peter Wimsey would *insist* on getting into bed with her. Colin entered the room in the middle of this remark one afternoon, and after recovering from what looked like an imminent attack of apoplexy, explained to their guest that Lord Peter Wimsey was Whiffles' Sunday name.

Presently they added a small black kitten named Spooks to their household. Colin didn't think much of that name, either, but when Ann demanded, "How would you like it if I called them Blackie and Fido?" Colin hugged her and admitted that he wouldn't like it at all.

One day in February, Ann looked up from a catalogue in the morning mail and said, "There's a new Lord Peter book coming out today—I'm driving to Seattle for it."

"You couldn't arrange about that here, could you?" Colin suggested.

"Not possibly," she said. "You know the circulating library never gets books less than six months old—and besides, I want to buy it."

"Okay, darling. I think you're quite mad, but I love you anyway. No one in the world but you would make a trip like that to buy a detective story! The more I consider your literary tastes, the less flattered I am at being your favorite author."

She didn't get the book, at that. It wasn't out yet, despite the publication date announced in the catalogue. Ann ordered a copy to be sent her to Port Drake, and then

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wandered around, rather at loose ends—it seemed slightly ridiculous to make that long drive, and return empty-handed.

She was delighted when she encountered Connie and Betsey in a department store. Betsey stuck out her feet for Ann's approval, and said proudly. "I've got new shoes."

"And very good looking ones they are, lamb," Ann nodded.

"Come out for lunch with us?" Connie asked. "I hope you'll drive us—I had trouble with the car and left it in a garage for Davey to pick up."

"Why not lunch with me here?"

"Well"—Connie said doubtfully—"Betsey's table-manners are not the best in the world, though she almost never gets food in her hair any more——"

They lunched in the tea-room, and Betsey behaved like a little lady. Afterward, Connie offered to drive as far as their house, and save Ann that much of driving, so Betsey took on the seat between them, and sang softly as they went along. Suddenly a streetcar thundered past, and Betsey lunged both arms around Ann's neck and buried her face in her hair. "Poor baby," she whimpered.

Connie looked at her disgustedly. "Poor baby, my eye," she muttered.

Betsey immediately stood up straight again, and looked ahead, picking up her song where she had broken off.

"You're an awfully good mother, Connie," Ann said, in some admiration.

Connie shrugged. "Just average," she said.

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When they had put Betsey to bed, the two girls settled down in the living room, and Connie said, "I'll have a cigarette with you before I start work. If a gracious providence would just see fit to send me sufficient time to do everything I want to ——"

"Don't you ever get bored, Connie?" Ann asked.

"Bored? No, of course not—I haven't time to be bored. Why, Ann—you aren't bored, are you?"

"A little." Ann sighed, and reached for another cigarette. "It sometimes seems to me that there ought to be something more to life ——"

"What else is there?" Connie inquired sensibly. "Mine's full enough. To overflowing, I might add. Ann ——" She broke off, eying her appraisingly.

"What?"

"Why don't you have a baby?"

"I don't know. I sort of shy off from the idea. It's so uncomfortable, and you get so ugly, and I'm not at all sure Colin would still love me if I were ugly. I'm sort of a big girl alongside Colin, just normally."

Connie snorted, and reached for her knitting. "Well, perhaps you may have noticed that Davey still retains some slight affection for me, in spite of having seen me through that ——"

"That's different," Ann said quickly, and immediately felt rather silly. It was a stupid remark.

"Well, it was just a suggestion. Far be it from me to try to run your life. But you should remember, Ann—Colin's nearly forty, and—well, it's just faintly possible that he

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would like to be able to look forward to some day having grandchildren ——”

“Gracious, you’re making ancestors out of us, and I’m so young, too!” Ann laughed. She got up and put on her coat, then leaned over Connie to kiss her. “Bye, darlin’—you’re awfully good for me, you know.”

“Goodbye, Ann. It’s been nice having a little time with you. Remember, angel, you’ve got the makings of an awfully satisfying life, you know.”

It was cold outside, and Ann pulled her fur coat close about her. The sky was grey and threatening ahead. Ann started quoting *Snowbound* to herself, and hoped it would snow. A few miles farther on, her wish was granted and big lazy flakes plastered themselves against the windshield. Then it began to snow in earnest, and the flakes became smaller, dry and powdery. Ann loved it. She never had had as much snow as she really liked.

It was a small blizzard by the time she drove up to the house, and Colin came out looking a little anxious. “I was hoping you’d get here—I didn’t want you snowbound in Seattle—with me in Port Drake.”

Ann slid over so that he could get in behind the wheel to drive the car into the garage. “Don’t you love it, Colin? Let’s pop corn and roast apples and toast marshmallows in front of the fire tonight ——”

“I believe the girl’s hungry,” he grinned.

Inside the house, Ann changed to warm red velvet pajamas, and went into the kitchen to start dinner, only to retreat shiveringly. “Somebody should have examined my

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head when I was planning this house! Why didn't anyone tell me that you need heat in a kitchen? Why did I think of a kitchen as a naturally warm and friendly place? What made me even think I needed a refrigerator in a kitchen the temperature of that one?"

Colin pulled her down beside him on the davenport. "In a little while I'll go out and bring in the ingredients, and we can have bacon, waffles and coffee—and of course your popcorn and apples and toasted marshmallows—in here."

Ann put her head on his shoulder, and said, "Darlin' ——"

The doorbell rang, and they both jumped. "Who could that be?" Colin wondered aloud, as he got up to answer it.

He opened the door, and Nina and Jock, all bundled up and covered with powdered snow, came dashing in. "Thank God for the Drakes on a night like this!" Nina said fervently. "Hi, Colin—hi, Ann!"

"Hullo—won't you come in?" Ann replied mechanically.

That, it seemed, was their intention. Also they demanded to be put up for the night. Nina had gone along with Jock when he drove up to Port Farrar, to interview a wealthy and bedridden client, and they'd gotten caught in the storm and decided it was silly to go on when they had good friends so close.

Colin explained that the temperature of their kitchen was enough to discourage Admiral Byrd, so if they were willing to eat what the Drakes intended to eat, they were more than welcome. He took Nina's fur coat, and established

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them all comfortably around the fire. "What would you like to drink?" he asked.

Nina said that the very thought of ice-cubes aroused in her a feeling of dreadful loathing, though Jock was trying to explain that a drink would be warming even if it had ice in it, and Colin said, "How about a rum punch?"

"Why, Colin—have you forgotten how utterly irresponsible a rum punch makes me?" Ann inquired. "I'm supposed to cook the dinner, such as it will be——"

"Ah," said Colin, "but we're married *now*." His eyes twinkled wickedly at her, and in the brief moment that their eyes met and held, Ann felt very close to him, and Jock and Nina were outsiders, shut out.

Colin was very competent, she thought dreamily, as she sat with glass in hand and watched him stirring up batter, and putting strips of bacon in the waffle iron. She roused herself, presently, enough to measure the coffee and plug in the percolator. Once she saw Colin regarding her with marked concern, and she crossed over to him, to squeeze his hand briefly. She felt a quick surge of rebellion, of anger at Nina and Jock for coming like this, trying to stir up things that were better left alone. What would they do all evening? When you had guests—even uninvited guests—you couldn't present them with a book and a chair apiece and suggest they catch up on their reading. Maybe Nina didn't read, anyway. Maybe even Jock didn't. He rather looked as if he had been leaving his intellectual life sternly alone.

Somehow, the evening wasn't so bad as she had expected.

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Maybe the rum punch helped. Ann didn't talk very much, but smoked a great many cigarettes, and listened to the others, who seemed to have no difficulty carrying on a normal polite conversation. Jock seemed a little remote, she thought, but Nina and Colin talked with the easy familiarity of old friends. It was midnight before she knew it, and Ann roused herself to be an excellent imitation of Connie as the competent hostess. She showed them to the bedroom, and got out pajamas for Jock and a nightgown and robe for Nina.

"It's a case of striking a happy medium," she laughed. "My things will be as much too big for Nina as Colin's things will be too small for Jock."

"I feel like a pig, turning you out of your own room," Nina said. She said it quite charmingly, and there was no reason for Ann to feel a quick illogical anger at implied criticism of her darling house.

"It's my fault for not building a guest room," she smiled. "I hope you'll sleep well. Good night."

She returned to the living room, and found Colin making up the studio couches in the alcove into beds. She offered to help, but he waved her away, and she sank down on the floor before the dying fire, and lit a cigarette. Colin made a series of strangled sounds through clenched teeth, and Ann looked up in alarm, expecting to see him in the last throes of hydrophobia. He looked quite healthy, though, and was holding a pillow in his teeth, stuffing it into a case. "What did you say?" Ann asked.

He shook the pillow, and dropped it on one of the

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couches. "Wouldn't I make a good chambermaid?" he asked, admiring his own efficiency.

"Wonderful. You may have Thursday nights off."

"Thank you. What I was saying—you'll get the big jitters if you don't stop smoking so much ——"

"I suppose I will, at that." Ann flung her cigarette into the fire, and lay back on the rug, her hands under her head.

"You'll never get 'em from drinking, anyway—how much punch did you have, about half a glass?"

"About," Ann admitted. "Nina's developing into a two-fisted drinker, isn't she?"

"Seems to be—she's probably trying to keep up with Jock. She didn't drink at all before they were married," Colin said.

"Neither did Jock," Ann said. The obvious inference was left unvoiced by both of them.

"Tired?" Colin asked.

"A little."

"We'll get to bed. Maybe we *should* have a bigger house, Ann."

"Who wants guests?" Ann said ungraciously.

"Feel that way about it?"

"Definitely."

Later, when they were in bed, Ann put her hands up over her head, and clutched a lock of Colin's hair.

"Colin ——" she said softly.

"Um huh?" He reached up and held both her hands.

"Would you mind coming in with me? I have something to say to you, and I can't shout it ——" She moved over

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against the wall and made room for him beside her. Then, with his arms around her, she merely sighed a little, and presently murmured, "Love me?"

"My dear ——" Colin's voice was deep with emotion.

"Then" —she hesitated again, then came out with it all at once—"Colin, let's have a baby."

"I'm sorry I've begun to bore you so soon," Colin said rather stiffly.

Ann silently cursed Colin's infallible memory, and her own heady assurance of a time so far back. "Damn and blast," she said heatedly, if inaudibly.

"Then, too, I might point out that one can't pick 'em off a Christmas tree. Very few are conceived at the precise moment chosen by their parents."

"I rather thought you might like to have a child, Colin," Ann said a little wistfully.

"I don't want anything for you that you don't want for yourself, Ann," Colin pointed out. "You need feel under no obligation to provide me with a child, just because I might like to have one. You don't owe me anything, you know ——"

"This is a nice emotional discussion, isn't it?" Ann said thoughtfully. "Damn it, Colin—didn't it ever occur to you that I might want to have a baby—*your* baby, Colin?"

Colin laughed softly, and his arms tightened convulsively. "It didn't, Ann—it didn't. But it's very nice to know!"

14

ANN OPENED HER EYES, AND LOOKED ACROSS THE ROOM AT Colin. He was dressed, and kneeling in front of the fireplace building a fire. The windows were all closed, and the room was beginning to get warm. Ann yawned once, then said, "Hullo."

Colin turned and smiled at her. "Hullo, darling—sorry if I woke you."

"Thassall right. I s'pose I have to get up and fix breakfast for our hungry guests. That is, I suppose we still have guests, haven't we?"

"So far as I know."

Ann sat up, and swung her feet over the edge of the couch. She grumbled a little as she groped about for her slippers.

"I wish it were *my* dressing-room and bath that open on the hall instead of yours. Makes me mad," she muttered.

"I've got to put on my red pajamas, and I don't want to put on my red pajamas, but I can't go busting in on our guests to get myself a change of clothes, can I? Colin, shall I start planning a wing for the house, so we can get it started when the weather clears up?"

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"We probably won't have guests very often," he pointed out, reasonably enough. "We haven't had, so far."

Ann was reaching for her clothes, and began to get dressed. "I'll bathe after they've gone. I've just decided that I wasn't too smart in planning this house—by the way, we'll have a register put in the kitchen when we're doing the revising. I shan't freeze throughout another winter. I think we'd better add three bedrooms and two baths in the wing."

"That's up to you," Colin said agreeably. "A more immediate problem is—what are we giving our guests for breakfast? The kitchen is—well, no warmer than it was last night. I set up the electric heater there, and while my back was turned it quietly died on me."

Spooks came sauntering in from the sunroom, yawning daintily, his pink tongue curling. He marched over to the front door, and Colin followed to let him out. He stood there a moment, then called to Ann, and together they watched the black kitten leaping up to catch the big snowflakes that drifted lazily downward, and then regard with puzzled surprise the nothingness between his paws. "It's Spooks' first snow," Ann laughed. "It's lovely out, isn't it? So quiet and white and peaceful. Doesn't the Sound look black?"

"Looks like more snow," Colin said, regarding the sky professionally. "And I don't mean just this casual snowfall. We'd better decide on breakfast, and get our guests up, unless we want 'em as semi-permanent fixtures in our household."

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"Heaven forbid," Ann said piously. "Where's Whiffles?"

"I let him out some time ago. Could you put your mind on breakfast, Ann? We can't very well give them waffles again, when that's what they had for supper."

"You put your mind on it," Ann said charmingly. "I'm going to get washed."

She felt a little more awake after her teeth were brushed and her face washed. She returned to the dining room, and found Colin setting the table, and bringing electric appliances in from the kitchen. "You know, Ann," he said, "I think we ought to have at least one servant ——"

Ann flung an arm around his neck and kissed his cheek. "Poor lamb, I'm not being very housewifely this morning, am I?"

"It isn't that, but it does seem a little silly for us not to. I'm not giving you nearly all the things I could ——"

"Dear heart, you're giving me everything I want. If I wanted a big house and a lot of servants, I'd say so. I don't want that kind of life!"

"When you add three more bedrooms and two baths, this house isn't going to be exactly small," he pointed out.

"That's a nursery and a room for the nurse and a bath for them, and a guest room and a bath for it—Colin, I thought we were going to send that back to Mr. Perroni."

Colin was opening a can of cantaloup balls. "Melon is a nice exotic fruit for mid-winter," he returned. Then, "Aren't you rather counting your chickens, Ann?"

"No harm in it, is there? Colin, I hate cantaloup."

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"We have to have fruit, my dear, and the larder seems a bit understocked."

"Oh, darling—I'm so sorry, but I forgot to phone Mr. Perroni before I left for Seattle yesterday." Ann felt briefly conscience-stricken, as she always did when she forgot one of the more important household tasks. But only briefly. Colin never harped on an oversight.

Breakfast was quite successful. Nina and Jock both were in good spirits, and there was no undercurrent of friction apparent as was so often the case when they were together. Ann sat quietly and played the gracious hostess, surreptitiously feeding her cantaloup balls to Spooks, who had a tremendous passion for the fruit, replenished coffee cups, passed cream and sugar and butter and marmalade, all rather automatically.

After breakfast, they went into the living room and sat around in front of the fire, talking of casual and unimportant things, as one does when well fed, and comfortable. Once Colin went to the window and peered out a little anxiously. "I think there's a bad storm brewing," he announced.

"We must go," Nina said, making no move.

"Yes, we really should," Jock agreed, settling deeper into his chair, and lighting another cigarette.

"Colin's begun a collection of incunabula," Ann said. "Did he show it to you?"

Nina looked interested. "Oh yes—you were talking to Eddie about it, weren't you?" Ann always felt a slight shock when Nina referred to her father so frivolously. Ann

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couldn't imagine anyone feeling quite comfortable addressing the stern and austere Mr. Greenwood by that name. "I'd like to see it, Colin."

"It's in the library," Colin said, getting up. "Coming, Jock?"

He shook his head. "I'm comfortable—and not frightfully interested in—incunabula," he murmured. "It sounds a little like a disease."

Ann heard Colin explaining to Nina as they went into the library, "You see, I really began it in self-defense—Ann has this tremendous passion for Lord Peter Wimsey, and——"

"Oh, there's Whiffles——" Ann said, and ran to the door to open it. "You know you aren't to scratch on the door," she said, scolding him. "Oh, darling, you're all wet—wait right there a minute——"

She came back with a turkish towel, and dried the little dog, who was shivering and very wet. "Now come over to the fire and get warm, you silly little mutt——" She kneeled beside him as he curled up on the rug, and continued to rub him affectionately with the towel.

"Ann——" Jock said.

"Yes?" Ann looked up, willing now to face him. Somehow her decision made the previous night seemed to have given her a defense against anything that Jock might do or say. More than anything else, it seemed effective in making Jock seem unimportant. For what part could he have in her life now? But even as she thought that, she felt a pang for the life that might have been theirs together.

"Are you happy, Ann?"

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"Passionately," she retorted, defiance in her voice.

"Must you shut me out so, Ann? We were pretty close once, you know, and—oh hell, I haven't been so happy since!"

"I'm sorry, Jock." Better to remain impersonal. Better not to remind him of whose fault it was. Better not to give him a chance to get under those defenses of hers—they were of such recent building they might not prove impregnable.

"I can't touch you any more, can I, Ann? You've shut yourself away from me, and you won't give me a chance. Is it because of—because I was so damn fresh that day we met in town?"

Ann shook her head. "That hasn't anything to do with it at all, Jock—it's just—well, we're all finished, aren't we? I don't see any point in our trying a refinement of torture by seeing each other at all. Of course I know it's not your fault—you can't very well tell Nina that—well, that you don't want to see me. I can understand that easily enough."

"It wasn't Nina who wanted to come here—it was I. She was all for trying to get through to town. She has no idea of—well, of what we once meant to each other. But I had to see you, Ann—I had to see you in the new setting you had made for yourself, and see for myself what kind of a life you were having."

"Were you satisfied?" Ann asked coldly.

"I'm satisfied that you are stronger than I—yes, if that's what you mean. But I'm not at all satisfied that you are happy. Ann ——" Impulsively he reached out and grasped her hand. "My dear ——"

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Ann pulled her hand away, and stood up. "I think you'd better be getting back to town, don't you, Jock? As Colin said, I think there's a storm coming up." Gather your defenses about you, Ann—quickly, lest they crumble at his touch.

"Yes, I think there is," Jock said strangely.

In a little while they were gone, and as Ann shut the door behind them, she said to Colin, "Darling, must you work today? Let's have this day together and just play—and make plans for our future. I really think it's going to be quite a nice future, Colin. You know, you're an awfully swell person to live with ——"

"You aren't a little hysterical, are you, darling?" Colin asked, putting his arms around her.

"Maybe a little," Ann admitted. "Oh gosh, Colin, I thought they'd never go."

15

ANN, IN SWEATER AND SLACKS, WAS BASKING IN THE sunroom, reveling in the gleams of sunshine. Outside, everything was fresh and green, new-washed by a belated spring shower. It had been just a small shower, too brief and light to do any damage to the new wing of the house, now well under way. Ann pored over her papers, oblivious to the sound of hammering in the offing.

"Hi, darling," she murmured to Colin, as he came into the room.

He pulled a footstool over beside her, and sat down.

Absently, she groped for his hand and gave it a brief, affectionate squeeze. "Look, angel, don't you think ——"

"Ann," Colin said, a curious urgency in his voice.

She looked up, then, and saw his face, grave and a little worried. "What is it, honey? Don't tell me they've skipped a dividend and we have to stop work on the house!"

He smiled then, and hugged her briefly. "My darling wife and her single-track mind! No—money is the least of my worries."

"What is it, then?"

He seemed to find it a little difficult to continue, and

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hesitated. "Would you mind awfully if I went away for a while?"

Ann said, grinning, "Don't tell me I have a rival!"

"Um huh. Her name is Julie, and she can't seem to get going amidst all the hullabaloo. Seriously, Ann, I can't seem to write in the middle of all this tumult, and it seems curiously important to me—more so than anything I've ever done, somehow."

Ann looked conscience-stricken. "Darling, I had no idea it would disturb you. Sort of silly of me, too, I suppose—if you can't even write with me in the room. And I haven't paid any attention to what you're doing. Is it a new novel, Colin? May I read it?"

"It's a new novel—a rather brief one, I think. I don't want you to read it—not yet, anyway. But I thought I'd go up to my shack in the mountains and really work on it. That is, of course, if you don't mind."

"How long would you be gone?"

"A couple of months, perhaps. No longer. I could come back now and then, but I think it would be better if I didn't."

"Could I go along?"

Colin smiled at her affectionately, and shook his head.

"That's rather the point, darling. No disturbing influences."

"Oh," said Ann.

"You could get Susie to come stay with you—I wouldn't want you to be alone."

"All right," Ann said.

"You don't mind, do you?"

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She smiled brightly. "Of course not. I'll have a lovely time. I'll sleep in pajamas and cover my face with tissue cream every night."

"Which you've been simply yearning to do all along?"

"Could hardly stand it," she confirmed.

"I love you, Ann," Colin said softly.

She wrinkled up her nose at him. "Angel!" she said, and leaned forward to kiss him.

Ann finished her weekly budget of news to Colin, and signed it "Your Ann," which was quite a satisfactory closing, she thought with pleasure. Then she added a postscript. "It's incredible how much I miss my husband." And that, she reflected, was literally true. Perhaps this had been a smart move on Colin's part, in more ways than one. She addressed the envelope, sealed and stamped it, put on a jacket and started her walk to town to mail it. One mail a week to the ranger station. She'd get a letter from Colin tomorrow or the next day.

As she passed the Home, she caught a glimpse of Mrs. Christmas in the side garden, so turned in. "Hullo, lady!" she called. "How are you and all the children?"

"Good mornin', Ann dearie," Mrs. Christmas said. "You're lookin' mighty bloomin' this mornin'. What do you hear from that husband of yours?"

"Nothing until tomorrow—he doesn't write me very much these days. Can't spare the time from his darling Julie."

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Mrs. Christmas looked startled. "What's that you say?"

"Don't be alarmed—Julie isn't flesh and blood. She's a figment of Colin's imagination, and he's devoting all his time to her. The heroine of his new story," she explained.

"Are you goin' down to get the mail?"

"Yes. And see the doctor," Ann added.

"You ain't sick, are you?"

"Of course not. I'm swell. As a matter of fact, I'd like to confirm a suspicion of mine," she added, in a sudden burst of confidence.

"A suspicion?"

"Um huh. I'm pretty sure I'm going to have a baby, and I want to find out definitely."

"Well!" said Mrs. Christmas. "Does Mr. Colin know?"

Ann shook her head. "And you needn't think I'm going to tell him, and have him come rushing back here and maybe ruin his perfectly good book. He would come rushing back, you know. He's like that."

The old lady nodded her head slowly. "After all, it ain't much to do with him now," she murmured.

"That's the way I felt about it—you're a lady after my own heart. Susie was all for getting him right back here."

"Susie?" Mrs. Christmas said, really startled this time.

Ann nodded. "She's living with me now, you know." Which, she thought as she made it, was a slightly absurd remark. Who would know that better than the matron of the Home?

"You mean you *told* Susie?"

"Why not? Susie's nearly eighteen, and we can scarcely

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expect her still to believe that babies are found under gooseberry bushes. I have to go now. I have an appointment—which doesn't mean a thing, of course, but I like to make a gesture of keeping it anyway." She waved gaily as she left.

Ann was in the kitchen, making a chocolate Bavarian cream, when Susie came in from school. "Did you see the doctor?" she burst out, without preamble.

Ann opened the refrigerator door, and shoved the mold inside. "Yes, my Susie, and it's all very true. Picture me as a fond mother if you can."

"Why not?" Susie demanded indignantly. "You'll make a beautiful mother, Mrs. Drake. What the world needs is more mothers like you."

"So nice to be answering a crying need of the world," Ann murmured.

"Are you going to tell Mr. Drake now?"

Ann looked a little impatient. "I thought we had settled that. Of course I'm not going to tell him—not until he gets back. It would be silly."

"I think you ought to tell him," Susie said stubbornly.

"Well, I won't—and, Susie!" Ann said sharply, surprising a purposeful look on the girl's face, "remember that it isn't any of your business! I can't think of anything worse than Colin's learning of it from someone other than me." Which was a fortunate way of putting it, she thought, watching the look of rebellion on Susie's face fading into conviction that Ann was right, at least on that point.

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That night, after Susie had gone to bed, Ann settled down with a new magazine and a cigarette, but she didn't read. Why shouldn't they adopt Susie? Give her a family, and give themselves a head start on one. She could hear Colin teasing her about it—"When you go in for maternity, you do it in a big way, don't you, darling?" But why not? On Susie's own account, she was awfully good with babies, and they'd have one for her to cope with before too long. But of course they wouldn't turn her into a servant—she would definitely be the daughter of the house. Send her to college—she wondered how her sorority would take to an orphan. Still, Colin Drake's daughter—and she would be legally that—would have a status of her own. It was definitely an idea.

The idea took a firmer hold on her mind the next morning. At breakfast, Susie said nonchalantly, "I forgot to tell you—I can graduate in June. I've got enough extra credits so I can, if I come out all right this semester. And if I don't, it'll be because I'm a half-wit," she added fervently, "with all the help you've been giving me."

"That will be grand, Susie."

"And then I'll get a job . . . Mrs. Drake?" she said sort of hesitantly.

"What, honey?"

"I've been wondering . . . do you have to have a real nurse for your baby? I'm awfully good with babies, and I thought maybe you'd give me a job. I'd like that an awful lot better than some old office job. It'd be wonderful to

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work for you all the time!" Susie's big brown eyes shone with adoration.

"But, honey—I'm not sure, of course, but I've discussed it a little with Colin, a long time ago—how about college? Wouldn't you like to go on to school?"

"Of course! But how can I? I'm almost eighteen, you know, and there's no reason for the Home to support me any longer."

"I thought we might send you to the University," Ann said, sort of diffidently.

Susie stared at her, wide-eyed. "Do you mean that?"

"Um huh. I'm a great devotee of the Gospel of Getting On," Ann murmured, and thought that she must be feeling better—that was the first quotation she'd made since Colin left. And not too apt at that, she admitted ruefully after a moment.

Happiness broke over Susie's face like a wave. She seemed incredulous, stunned, unwilling to believe it for a moment, then, as she did believe it, she sprang to Ann's side and hugged her. "I always did say you were the sweetest person in the world!" she exclaimed extravagantly.

Ann wasn't altogether pleased. She didn't like thinking of herself as sweet. It seemed a bit insipid. "It'll be Colin's money—not mine—that does it," she said.

"It's your idea, though," Susie insisted.

"Um huh," Ann admitted. "Better run along, darling, or you'll be late." She kissed Susie's cheek, then spanked her to propel her on her way. She felt very good.

As she lit a cigarette, Helga Carpello came in. "Good

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morning, Helga," Ann said pleasantly. "You can clear the things away and do the dishes before you start on the washing. I'm going to walk into town."

"Good mornin', Mis' Drake," Helga answered. "You don't need to go for the mail if you don't wanta—my Pete'll bring it out if you want. He don't have nothin' else to do."

"Oh dear, Helga. Has Pete lost his job again?" She was getting a little tired of finding jobs for Pete Carpello. He was such a good carpenter, too. "I'll speak to Mr. Hansen and see if he can use him here. But he'll have to stop drinking, Helga."

"Yes ma'am. That's what I'm always tellin' him. But it don't seem to do no good. And he's got such an awful temper, he will get into fights. And he's awful jealous of me, ma'am," she added, not without pride.

"But, Helga, you don't give him any occasion to be jealous, do you?"

"Well, ma'am, I can't help it when people like me," Helga murmured.

Ann looked at Helga, who was rather good-looking in a big, bovine sort of way. "I suppose not," Ann said helplessly, thinking with dismay that Colin was right—she couldn't keep out of personal discussions with the people who worked for her. It was awfully undignified, and certainly not suitable to her position in Port Drake. "I'll speak to Mr. Hansen," she said firmly, and left the room.

She went outside, and walked around to the new wing, which was growing impressively fast.

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"Is Mr. Hansen around?" she asked the first workman she encountered.

"Just left," he said, then raised his voice. "Hey, Hansen! Mis' Drake wants to see you!"

"Coming," yelled a voice from the road. Ann sauntered down the path to meet him.

"Good morning, Mrs. Drake. How does it look to you?" he greeted her pleasantly. Mr. Hansen was a big blond man. He had been to college, and to Ann was distinguished from his workmen, likewise big blond men, for the most part, by more careful enunciation and a blue serge suit.

"It looks grand, Mr. Hansen." Ann smiled at him. "And now that you're doing that so well, I wonder if you'll do something else for me ——"

Suspicion clouded Mr. Hansen's clear blue eyes. "Now listen, Mrs. Drake, if it's about that Pete Carpello ——"

"How clever of you, Mr. Hansen!" Ann crowed. Then her voice took on a coaxing tone. "He needs a job so badly, and I'm sure he won't drink any more—at least not while he's working ——"

"Listen, Mrs. Drake, that guy's dangerous! He can work well enough, drunk or sober, but he's a mean little man, and I'm not going to have him start carving on any of my good men."

"Don't be melodramatic, Mr. Hansen," Ann reproached him.

"I tell you it wouldn't be safe to have him working here. His wife's your laundress, isn't she?"

Ann nodded. "But what does that have to do with it?"

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"Well, he gets screwy ideas, and she's no angel—she likes to make eyes at a big good-lookin' guy as well as the next one—and you can't blame her much, I suppose."

"She's only here one day a week," Ann pointed out.

"Hell—excuse me, Mrs. Drake—heck, one hour would be long enough."

"I think you're being a little absurd," Ann said. "After all, you admit that Pete is a good carpenter ——"

"None better," he admitted reluctantly. "He's a cabinet-maker ——"

"Well, we *need* good carpenters for all those built-in features, don't we?" Ann said triumphantly. "Come on, Mr. Hansen—surely your men are big enough to take care of themselves?" If her voice was a trifle scornful, it was what she intended. Pete Carpello was such a *little* man!

"Oh, all right," Mr. Hansen said, with a small gesture of resignation. "I suppose there's no point in taking it out on his wife and kids, because he's an unruly gent. You win—I'll take him on."

"Thanks—you're a pal," Ann beamed at him.

They started down the path together. "Are you going to town? I'll drive you down, if you like."

"Thank you," Ann said. "I rather miss the car, though I didn't think I would."

"When's Mr. Drake coming back?"

"I'm not sure yet. It all depends. I'm going down this morning to see if there's a letter from him."

There was a letter. Ann put it in her pocket, and glanced over the less interesting mail on her way back to the house.

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She shed her jacket, then curled up in a big chair in the library to read Colin's letter. It wasn't long—he wrote perhaps half a dozen lines each day, and posted the total when he went down to the ranger station to wait for her weekly letter. His book was getting along so well it frightened him—it couldn't be good, when it went so easily. He loved her very much.

Ann lit a cigarette. The doctor had been surprisingly amiable about it. Smoking wouldn't hurt her, unless she smoked too much, and even an occasional cocktail wasn't forbidden. Ann was willing to do anything that was necessary. She was going to be very thorough about this business of being a mother. She positively luxuriated in the idea. Colin would be pleased, too, and that would be nice. She was sure that Colin would be a very superior father—she'd probably have to work considerably harder in order to be an equally superior mother. It was a little difficult to visualize herself with a baby—on the whole, she felt awfully young and inexperienced.

After lunch, Ann dressed, rather absurdly for her proposed walk in the woods, in a frivolous gown of candy-striped green and white chiffon. It was a garden-party dress—she liked it because Colin said she looked like a mint julep in it, delicious and refreshing—which pleased her, even if she failed to see the analogy. She liked the way it outlined her slender body, and decided she should make the most of her clothes before she had to start wearing smocks.

She sauntered, with Lord Peter frisking around her joyously, down the wooded path that led to the shore. It was a

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beautiful day, clear and sunny, and she felt contented and full of well-being. She was perched precariously on a rail fence, her full chiffon skirt draped gracefully about her, when she saw Jock coming down the path. He looked fit, in the sunlight, tall and handsome in his brown tweeds. "Hullo, beautiful!" he shouted at her.

She responded warmly, in spite of herself. Jock was so very good to look at! She hadn't seen him for some months—not since he and Nina had stayed overnight at their house—and was disgusted at the ridiculous way her heart acted. It thumped alarmingly at the very sight of him. Jock was married, and she was married—she mustn't lose sight of those two very important facts.

He stood beside her, and flung an arm carelessly about her waist, which gave her a further twinge of uneasiness. For Colin was so far away, and Jock so very close. "It's a beautiful day, isn't it? I was driving through, and thought I'd stop off to see you. Brunhilde—or somebody—told me you'd taken this path."

"That was Helga—my laundress."

"Oh? It's been an awfully long time, Ann. In spite of the unpromising way our last interview ended, we shouldn't let such a long time go by without seeing each other. It ain't right!" He smiled a little crookedly, and turned to look into her face.

Her voice was carefully casual as she answered him. "There isn't much reason for our meeting, is there, Jock? In fact, it's better that we don't I think. For after all, we know—even though we hate to admit it—that friendship

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simply isn't possible, when you've been in love before."

"And who in hell said anything about friendship?" Jock inquired roughly.

Oh dear, Ann thought. *Now* she'd done it, after having been so careful for so long. She felt a quick twinge of anger at Jock, for disturbing her mental picture of herself. No one ever made a pass—verbal or physical—at *Connie*. And not because Connie wasn't attractive, either. Ann knew, in that queerly honest mind of hers, that Connie was not only better looking, she was infinitely more desirable to men than Ann herself. But Connie was so definitely Davey's. Connie and Davey and Betsey—they were a definite entity. Perhaps it was Betsey that made the difference—and, ignoring the years when there had been only Connie and Davey, Ann decided that her child would put her in the same sacrosanct class as Connie. And, abruptly, she decided to tell Jock—though it gave her an uneasy feeling that it was a bit rough on Colin that Jock should know of his child before he did. "I'm going to have a baby, Jock," Ann said quickly.

Jock jumped at the statement, coming without preamble out of a long silence, but quickly regained his composure. "How nice," he said politely. "That is, I'm assuming you want one."

"Naturally," Ann said drily.

Jock thrust a cigarette into his mouth, and snapped his lighter. It didn't work, which must have been annoying, Ann thought—poor Jock, trying to be nonchalant. She handed him the paper of matches she was carrying. He lit his cigarette, and put the matches in his pocket.

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"That sort of disestablishes any claim I might have had on you, doesn't it, Ann?" he said slowly.

"I don't think you have had any claim—at least, not for a long time," she answered gently.

"Don't rub it in," Jock retorted sharply. There was a little silence, before he added grudgingly, "Sorry, I'm not at my best. Perhaps I'd better leave."

"I'll walk back to the house with you, and give you tea before you start back," Ann volunteered.

"You don't have a good stiff drink around, do you?"

"I might even manage that," Ann said.

She made tea, but Jock ignored it and drank three large highballs in quick succession. Then he got up. "Well—good luck to you, kid! I may not like this life you're making for yourself, but I've got to admire your nerve."

Ann ignored that. "Say hello to Nina for me," she murmured.

"Do you think I'm nuts?" Jock asked rudely. He added, "Congratulate Colin for me."

Ann repeated his retort, but not aloud. "Goodbye, Jock," she said.

"You know," he said slowly, "I think it is." Without another word he left.

Ann was still sitting beside the tea-table when Susie came home from school.

16

IT WAS A COLD, GREY DAY, AND TO ANN'S ANNOYANCE IT started to rain a little as she approached the house on her return from the post office. The weather was uncooperative, Helga would have to hang the wash in the basement, and she preferred the clean fresh smell of clothes that had dried in the sun. Ann dumped the mail on Colin's desk in the library, and tossed a couple of alder logs on the fire, before going to remove her coat and hat. She looked around the living room, decided, with unhousewifely haste, that on such a dark day it was sheer waste of time to dust, then went to her room to exchange her tweed suit and sturdy walking shoes for a knit rose chenille house coat and slippers. She surveyed herself approvingly in the mirror. The coat had short "push-up" sleeves, a slim waist, and a long, flowing skirt. Too long, she observed ruefully, as she stumbled over it taking her first step. It had stretched and stretched and stretched, and she'd taken additional hems in it twice, and it still dragged when she walked. However, as she didn't intend to do any work, it didn't matter.

Ann curled up in a chair in front of the fire, and lit a cigarette before glancing through the mail. Five bills—she'd

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send out checks tomorrow. Might as well keep up with them—Colin loathed the task of paying bills, and he should be returning soon. “Dear Mrs. Drake: We are pleased to announce ——” Bother! She threw the advertisement in the fire—it had looked like a legitimate letter, too, even though it was on slightly ritzier stationery than most of her friends affected. Four letters for Colin—she enclosed them in a large addressed envelope that went off to him weekly when she sent hers—and three new magazines. Life was dull when Colin was away. Even the mail lacked flavor.

Lord Peter Wimsey came and nudged at her knee with his muzzle. She put down the magazine, and patted him absently. “Good ol’ Peter—are you a bit bored with the boss away too?” He yawned in her face, and Ann laughed and followed his example. “Don’t you wish something exciting would happen, Peter-Whiffles?” she said, reflecting that she really ought to make up her mind what she was going to call him, and stick to it.

Suddenly she heard a scream, footsteps on the basement stairs, and the kitchen door burst open. Helga, flushed and frightened, came running in. “Oh, Mis’ Drake, my husband—he’s goin’ for me with a knife ——”

“Nonsense, Helga,” Ann said, getting to her feet. “Stay there, Peter ——” She took Helga’s arm, and guided her out to the kitchen. “Really, Helga,” she admonished her, a little impatiently, “you’ve been seeing too many movies. People don’t do such things, really ——”

“Mis’ Drake, you don’t know my Pete ——” Helga expostulated, hanging back.

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"Where is he, Helga?" The kitchen was empty, the basement door open as Helga had left it in her flight.

"He's out back—I don't think he'd come in here—oh, Mis' Drake, be careful ——"

Ann opened the door that led to the back porch, and encountered Pete Carpello, small and swarthy, an insignificant person to frighten big blond Helga. "What is this nonsense, Pete?" Ann demanded sternly.

His eyes, clouded with liquor, avoided hers. "S-s-so!" he hissed at Helga, and advanced threateningly. Ann backed up—not because she was frightened, but because she didn't want him to touch her, as he might in passing through the door. Helga cowered behind Ann, who felt curiously unconvinced by the whole scene. It was very bad melodrama, and surely a director would shout "cut" before it went any further.

And then suddenly everything happened at once. A knife was clutched in Pete's hand, and his face was contorted with fury. Ann stepped forward and opened her mouth to protest, and a rough hand knocked her out of the way. She staggered back, tripped over the skirt of her house coat, and as she fell, she remembered, sickeningly, that the basement floor was cement.

If only her head would stop hurting! Her whole body felt crushed, but her head—thousands of hammers beating at her brain, the pillow under her head an active agony. . . . Where was she? . . . If only her head didn't

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hurt so, she'd open her eyes. . . . With a tremendous effort, she managed it, and there was Colin—untidy and rather dirty, his face unfamiliar and bearded. Only a week's growth? He'd written once that in the woods he shaved only once a week, and he really had to shave twice a day to look respectable, Ann thought foolishly. "You look rather patriarchal, darling," she said, and even to herself her voice sounded far away and thin.

"Don't talk, Ann," Colin said. His hand tightened over hers, and his voice deepened a little as he said, "Can you ever forgive me for letting this happen to you?"

The room was white and unfamiliar . . . it must be the hospital. Memory was returning to Ann, fragmentary, but definite. She ran her free hand down over her body, and winced at the contact. "What happened to Helga?" she asked.

"Helga's all right—Pete didn't touch her, he was so frightened—and sobered—by what he'd done to you."

"Where is Pete?"

"In the hospital at present. They took what was left after Lord Peter finished with him here to be gathered together into a neat enough bundle to take to jail."

Ann smiled, painfully. "Lord Peter, like his d-distinguished namesake—not namesake, namesake isn't what I mean—anyway, Lord Peter not arriving on the scene of the crime until after the murder . . ." Her voice trailed away, and she had to make herself continue. She had to know. "It *was* murder, wasn't it, Colin?" He didn't answer, and she repeated it, her voice sharp with anxiety.

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"Wasn't it, Colin?" She searched his face, and read the answer there before it came in words—slowly, reluctantly.

Ann took a deep breath. "I knew it, really—I just hoped ——"

"My dear," Colin said, "oh, my very dear one ——"

"I can take it, Colin," Ann said, very distinctly.

There was a long silence, Colin's hand holding hers very tightly, before Ann asked, "Why wasn't I killed, Colin? I don't mean I wish I had been, but if I landed on the cement head first why aren't I dead?"

"You landed on a pile of laundry, dear."

"Then—why"—wincing as she touched her head—"does my head feel like this?"

"Well, you hit twenty or thirty wooden steps before you landed," Colin explained gently.

A nurse hustled in then and said, "You must leave now, Mr. Drake. Your wife must rest."

Ann squeezed his hand and murmured, "Poor Colin—I'm always making you hang 'round hospitals, aren't I?"

Ann submitted to the hypodermic without comment, watched the nurse lower the shades a little farther and leave the room. She wondered if anyone had told Connie . . . she wanted to see Connie very much. . . .

She roused a little, once, when someone said, "Drink this," and obediently swallowed, and when she woke again the room was quite dark, and her head felt all right if she didn't move it. She stirred a little, and that hurt, and then she felt a hand on hers, and Colin said very softly, "Ann?"

"Hullo, is it dark already?"

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"Yes, it's after eight o'clock."

"This morning seems so far away," Ann sighed.

"It was yesterday morning, dear," Colin said gently. Then he continued, "Your father and Connie are here, Ann. They've been hoping to see you."

"Please send them in," Ann said.

Colin left, and pretty soon Connie and her father came in. They kissed her, then sat down on either side of the bed, each holding a hand. "Poor baby," her father said, and Connie murmured, "Awfully tough luck, kid."

"Tell me about it," Ann said. It seemed almost too much of an effort to talk.

Connie talked brightly. Thank heaven Connie was normal! "Mr. Hansen arrived at the house and heard Helga screaming like a fire siren—he came in and found her having hysterics, and Pete on the floor with Lord Peter (very confusing, those names) systematically taking pieces out of him. He pulled the dog off and shut him in a closet before he could get anything out of Helga. She screamed that you were dead and Pete had killed you, and now the dog had killed Pete—though, according to Mr. Hansen, Pete was an uncommonly noisy corpse. He saw you then, in a heap at the foot of the stairs, dashed down and carried you up, then phoned for the doctor and ambulance. They arrived simultaneously, and carted you off to the hospital before Mr. Hansen turned his attention to Pete, who was still lying on the floor, making most unpleasant noises. He called another doctor for Pete—he hadn't even mentioned Pete to Dr. Bancroft, I guess—then called the ranger station

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to get word to Colin to come down as fast as he could get here—he didn't know how badly you were injured. Colin came straight to the hospital, and sat beside you until you regained consciousness—that was this morning."

"I seem to make an awful mess of things, don't I? Do you suppose it's punishment for my bloodthirsty literary tastes?" Ann asked slowly. She could think very clearly, but it was difficult to talk. She should use shorter words, but it seemed somehow important to assert her ability to use longer ones.

"Don't try to talk, Ann," Dad protested. "Is there anything we can get for you? Is there anything at all you want?"

"No," Ann said, "nothing." Just to have my baby back again—oh, dear God, why did you have to take my baby? Are you punishing me for not loving Colin as he deserves?

"We'd better go, Dad," Connie said softly. She leaned over Ann, and kissed her. "Keep your chin up, honey. You'll be all right."

Colin came back in, after they had gone, bearing flowers—red and white camellias, and a great mass of violets in a copper bowl from the house. "Thank you, Colin—they're lovely," Ann said.

He put them on the table beside her, then sat down and held her hand. "You don't feel like talking, do you, Ann?"

"Not much," she confessed. "You talk, Colin—you have such a nice, soothing voice."

Colin talked, then—not about the accident, or anything pertaining to it—and now that Ann's curiosity had been

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satisfied, she didn't want to dwell on it—and Ann, scarcely listening, found the smooth cadences of his voice acting as a hypnotic, until she was nearly asleep. A nurse came in, with a florist's box. "It's addressed to your house," she said.

Colin took it from her, and opened it. "From Jock," he said, when the nurse had gone, at his dismissing nod.

Ann roused herself from her lethargy, to inquire, "Mr. and Mrs. John Hamilton?"

He handed her the card. It read, "Love, Jock."

Ann looked distressed. "Colin, I can't understand ——"

He smiled at her. "That's all right, Ann." He picked up the contents, and held it for her inspection. A single white orchid.

"An orchid—from Jock?" Ann exclaimed incredulously, and then, suddenly, she remembered. Four—five years ago, sauntering down University Way, arm in arm with Jock, stopping to admire the orchids in a florist's window. "No man in his right mind will ever send *you* orchids, Ann," Jock had said. She was affronted. "And why not, I'd like to know." "You're too human, darling—orchids—well—'you may look, but you mustn't touch.'" And she had been satisfied. So now, difficult as it was to talk, she explained to Colin. "It's a symbol, Colin—to show me he realizes that—he may look at me, but he can't touch me."

Colin looked a little sad. "Ann, my dearest, do you feel you need explain to me?"

After Colin had gone, and a nurse had administered a hypodermic, as Ann drifted off to sleep, she remembered

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that there was something she had to think about . . . something very important . . . but she couldn't think what it was. Just before she slept, she remembered—the baby. She must have another baby right away, before she could get to brooding over the one she had lost, before she could remember too much, and be frightened.

Ann woke, and stretched luxuriously in the sun. It was late afternoon, and she was lying on the couch in the living room, the window open above her head, and the fresh sweet smells of the garden floating into the room. It was a month since the accident, and she was nearly well. They never talked about it—just once she had complained to Colin, “It costs just as much not to have a baby as to have one, and it's much more painful,” but that was the only time they had brought the subject up at all. When she had proposed to Colin that they adopt Susie, except for his initial protest that she was too young to take on such a responsibility, he hadn't objected at all. Though always he had been eager to get Ann everything she wanted, now he seemed even more so—and if she felt that Susie would help to take her mind off her loss, she should have Susie. Ann thought, smiling a little, that if she had proposed to adopt the entire Home, Colin would have let her. But she didn't want anything like that—she just wanted Susie.

Susie's face, when they told her, would have been ample reward, even if Ann had felt that she was taking on a big task—which she didn't. Susie moved into the guest room, in

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the new wing of the house, and tried to make herself realize that she had a family at last. The first night, Ann went in to say good night, and sat down on the edge of her bed.

"Happy, Susie?" she asked.

"It's heaven," Susie breathed.

"We'll have fun together, Susie—and you'll forget that there ever was a time when you didn't belong to us."

"What'll I call you?" Susie asked then. "I can't very well go on calling you Mrs. Drake—but I can't call you Mother—it would be too silly. I could call Mr. Drake Father all right—but gosh, you're just a few years older than I."

"You can call me Ann."

"Wouldn't you mind? I'd like that—Ann."

"And Susie!"

"Yes?"

"You must call my husband Colin, you know."

Susie looked aghast. "I wouldn't dare ——"

"Susie! If you call me Ann, you have to call him Colin—understand?"

So they became Ann and Colin to Susie. Once in a while she called them Momma Drake and Poppa Drake, but that was all part of the fun.

Ann yawned a little, and reflected that she must take Susie into Seattle and get her ready for school soon. She might take her out to the sorority house, too—usually there was a girl or two there who stayed at the house in the summer—and not necessarily drips. Bibs Wyman used to stay there quite often—she usually had a summer job at the

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University, of some sort—Bibs couldn't leave the campus alone even during the summer. And perhaps Bibs' successor at running the place had the same habits.

Ann suddenly became conscious of voices—there had been a low murmur all along, but now they were clearer, as if a window had been opened. Without actual intent, Ann listened, to identify the second voice. With a sudden little shock, she realized it was Nina who was in the library with Colin. She didn't really intend to listen, but Nina's voice suddenly was raised sharply, and she couldn't avoid hearing. "I know that in marriage there's always one who loves more and one who loves less—I wouldn't mind being the one who loved more, if Jock loved me at all. He doesn't. I honestly believe that Jock isn't capable of loving anyone but himself. He doesn't even love Ann, though he has a pretty little fiction that he does—I don't know what story he invented to justify his marriage to me, but I haven't a doubt that it was beautifully convincing." After a short pause, she went on, rather bitterly, "It's my own fault, you know—when I first saw him I thought he was the most beautiful thing in the world, and I couldn't rest till I got him. Well—I got him. If he weren't my husband, Eddie would have kicked him out of the firm long ago—but Eddie's a great one for family, and as long as Jock is my husband, he's family, right or wrong."

She couldn't hear Colin's reply, but then Nina's voice came again—much louder than she usually talked, and Ann could recognize notes of hysteria in it. "God, Colin, don't you suppose I know what a fool he's making of me? I'm not

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blind, or stupid. It's humiliating—it's disgusting of me, but I've sunk so low that if he even pretended any more, I'd be grateful. I'd be glad to shut my eyes to the things he does, if he'd only pretend to love me when he's around me . . .” and then suddenly she was crying, horrid gasping sobs that seemed fairly torn out of her. Ann hurried into the bedroom and shut the door.

She sat down in front of the dressing table, and looked in the mirror. “Poor Colin,” she murmured involuntarily. Poor, dear Colin, destined by fate to listen to the women Jock had hurt. She felt ashamed at having heard what had not been intended for her, sorry for Nina—and above all, grateful to Colin. For Ann was afraid that if she hadn't married Colin, she would be one of the girls now engaged in hurting Nina. Or she would if Jock still wanted her. She felt that only loyalty to Colin would be a strong enough defense for her, against Jock. She knew that by the way her heart still turned over at a sudden glimpse of Jock.

There was a knock at the door, and Ann moved over to the chaise longue before she said, “Come in.” But it was only Susie. Ann relaxed, and patted the seat beside her. “Come sit down, Susie. How'd it go?”

Susie had a tennis racquet under her arm, and her face was burned a dark red above the white of her shirt. “Darling, you've got to put something on your face! How did you get so burned?”

“It's not all burn, Ann—I'm so hot I'm red, too,” Susie explained, fanning herself.

Ann was skeptical, and got up to look for some sunburn

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lotion. Susie followed her into the bathroom. "Ann, you should let me do that—you should be resting ——"

"Don't be silly. I'm all recovered—still just a bit lazy, is all. Peel off your shirt, kid, and I'll get to work on you. You should have put cocoa butter on first, before you went out in the sun—it won't do any good now. But I've got some pretty good goop here—pin your hair up, honey, or it'll get all messed up—that should help." Ann was patting in great gobs of the "goop" as she talked, and presently Susie looked prepared to swim the English Channel. "Did you see Colin as you came in?"

Susie nodded. "He was putting Mrs. Hamilton into her car."

"Oh," said Ann, feeling a little deflated. It wasn't like Nina to leave without even attempting to see her. No matter how upset she was, her social conscience should take care of that. She gave Susie a little spank, and said, "There you are, kid. Run along to your room and let that soak in for a while. You really don't look very respectable. You have a couple hours before dinner, and I'll look in half an hour or so ahead of time with some calamine lotion that will sort of tone down that boiled lobster effect of yours."

Ann was scrubbing the grease off her hands when she heard Colin call questioningly, "Ann?"

"Here I am," she said. "Come on in—I've been greasing up the daughter who apparently has been trying to get a complete lifeguard tan in one session."

"She's not seriously burned, is she?"

"Oh, I don't think so—her skin is pretty fair and burns

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easily. I think she'll be all right in a day or two." Ann dried her hands, and polished her nails with the towel. She examined her right hand carefully, and said, "Oh—Susie told me she saw you putting Nina into her car. I'm sorry I didn't see her."

"I thought you were asleep," Colin said. "She didn't want to disturb you."

Liar, Ann thought. If I was asleep on the couch when you saw me last, the very fact that I wasn't still on the couch should prove that I wasn't asleep. She felt a little annoyed with Colin and then, immediately, sorry that she was, and kissed him quickly and impetuously, to prove to herself that she wasn't, really.

"Why, Mrs. Drake," Colin said, in mock alarm, and then his arms closed around her convulsively. "My dear," he murmured in her ear, "what if I had lost you?"

"I'm sort of glad you didn't, myself," Ann said impudently. "On account of—oh, on account of a number of things, chief among which is that life is definitely worth living—with you." She was a little surprised, herself, at the fervor in her voice.

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ANN SAT UP IN BED, AND LOOKED ACROSS AT HER HUSBAND, who was still sleeping. "Colin," she said presently. Then again, louder, "Colin?"

"My dear?" he said sleepily, not opening his eyes.

"You sound familiar," Ann said musingly. "I wonder why it is that I sometimes feel I don't really know you?"

Colin yawned, then opened his eyes. "When I get out from behind these whiskers, it may help," he suggested, rubbing his chin reflectively.

"Silly," Ann murmured. "It's not your facade I'm talking about. It's you—the real you. Perhaps it's that I've never seen you lose your temper. There's something sinister about a man who's so unfailingly amiable as you—and who can write such diabolical stuff," she added thoughtfully.

"I've never been angry with you," Colin said.

"Why not, do you suppose?"

"Dunno," he yawned. "It's not because I love you, for you can love a woman devotedly and still want to beat her regularly—it must be that there's some special quality in our life together ——"

"I smell bacon," Ann sniffed. "That angel Susie! Let's

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get up—I'm hungry. It's going to be an awful blow to me to have to get up and cook breakfasts mornings again, when Susie moves to Seattle next month."

"We'll get a maid," Colin said. "I've been thinking we should, for some time."

"By the day only," Ann warned him. "I won't have a stranger living here."

"It will leave you more to do if we don't have her live in," Colin said. "But it's up to you, of course. I can't see that it would matter very much."

"Well, I can. I wouldn't mind someone like Mrs. Christmas ——"

"We could get her," Colin said. "She'd give up the Home in a minute, to come back to me."

"On second thought, I would mind her. Very much. It gets me down awfully for her to call you 'Mr. Colin' all respectful-like, and call *me* 'Ann dearie.'"

"I'll speak to her about it ——"

"Don't you dare! Oh, I don't really mind as things are now—but I don't want her living with us and addressing us that way. Colin, are you going to get *up*?"

He turned over and regarded her sleepily. "Why?"

Ann swung out of bed, and threw herself upon him. "Lazybones, I'm taking Susie into town, and if we want to get there in time to get anything done, we've got to start before long. We'll stay a day or two, if you can spare the car."

Colin pulled her close to him. "I can spare the car better than I can you," he murmured, nibbling gently at her ear.

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"Sweet one," she said, turning to kiss his nose. "How's your novel, duck?"

"Drake," Colin corrected her absently. "It's finished." Ann sat up indignantly. "Where is it?"

"In the hands of my publisher—may he treat it gently."

"And I haven't seen it!"

"Time enough, my sweet. Did you say something about getting up?"

Ann stood up and frowned at him. "Certainly. I wouldn't think of sharing a bed with you another minute! I don't think I can even bear to share breakfast with you. Of all the unfair ——"

"Did I ever tell you how beautiful you are in a chiffon nightie? No? Remind me to tell you sometime. I can wax pretty lyrical on the subject. In fact ——"

"Oh, you're hopeless!" Ann said, and vanished into her dressing room.

Colin came out of the post office, and started toward home. A car stopped beside him, and a woman's voice said, "May I give you a lift, Mr. Drake? I'm going out to see your wife."

"Ann isn't home, Mrs. Warren. How are you and all the little Warrens?"

Joan Warren frowned, and looked troubled. "I wanted to see Ann. Well, get in, anyway—I might as well take you home. Where is she?"

"Seattle. She took Susie in to get her outfitted for school.

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It starts next month, and Ann's pretty much starting from scratch with her wardrobe."

Joan started the car, and they drove for a few minutes in silence. "Maybe it's just as well Ann isn't home—I was so mad, I had to come tell her, but it probably wouldn't help any ——"

"What do you mean?"

"Well—of course you know that charmin' lady Beulah Bedelle?"

"I know her slightly. Her husband of course is an old friend. Ann doesn't like her."

"I know. And what is perhaps more important, she doesn't like Ann."

"How dare she?" Colin said indignantly.

"Hey"—Joan retorted, sidetracked for a moment—"this is a democracy we live in—remember? I may deplore her poor taste, and detest her methods—but I'll defend her right to dislike even your wife! But, in all seriousness, I didn't think her spite would carry her quite so far as it has. Of course, you know I don't get around much, and naturally I'm the last person in town to hear gossip—next to you and Ann, of course—but—well, do you want me to tell you this?"

"Please do," Colin said. "If it concerns Ann, I'm the most interested person. I won't have that woman hurting Ann!"

"She's poisonous!" Joan said fervently. "Well—it isn't easy for me to tell you this, but please understand that I don't believe a word of it, nor an implication. I'm simply

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telling you what Beulah is spreading around the town. It's all very insidious, but her innuendos are worse than plain statements would be. The general idea is that you didn't prosecute Pete Carpello but got him out of town because the accident was fortunate for Ann and she made it worth his while."

"I'm afraid I don't understand what you mean. Ann wouldn't prosecute because she was sorry for Helga. He got out of town because there never would be a job for him here, after what he did to Ann."

"I know that, and of course everyone else should too. But Beulah is insinuating that it was a very convenient accident—oh hell, I can't tell you. It's obviously absurd, but people will believe anything!"

"Please tell me the rest of it," Colin said, between set teeth.

Joan flushed. She was silent while she swung the car into the driveway, and stopped the engine. Then she faced Colin squarely. "The implication is that the child Ann lost wasn't yours." She caught her breath, then burst out, "It's all so hellishly, damnably rotten, and there's no way of stopping her. Oh God, why didn't somebody strangle that woman years ago?"

"I'd rather enjoy doing it myself," Colin said grimly. "Her little story certainly puts us both in a pretty light, doesn't it? Am I supposed to be a moron, or didn't she say?—never mind. Do you have any suggestions?"

Joan shook her head. "I was hoping Ann could think of some way to shut her mouth."

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"No," Colin said violently. "Ann's not to know of this—not now or ever. Good God, hasn't Ann had enough to bear these last few months? I could have Skippy fired, though I'd hate to—but then they'd leave town ——"

Joan shook her head. "Don't blame Skippy. I'm sure he doesn't even know about it. Beulah chooses her audience with discrimination. And that would make it worse, don't you see?"

"Yes," Colin said reflectively, "I guess you're right. Do you suppose if I saw her—no, that wouldn't do any good. She doesn't bear me any special love, since Millicent . . ." His voice trailed off. Absently, he lit a cigarette, then recollected himself and offered one to his companion. "I think I have it, Joan," he said, using her Christian name unconsciously, "and thanks a lot—you're a good friend to Ann, bless you."

*

It took three days to complete Susie's wardrobe, and get her hair licked into shape with an expensive haircut and permanent wave. Ann regarded the finished product proudly. Susie still wasn't pretty—nothing on earth could give beauty to Susie's impish features—but she had personality, which was infinitely better. And there was something very arresting about the child, with a smart hairdress and good looking clothes. "You'll do us credit, Susie," she informed her warmly.

Susie looked a little rueful. "I'm afraid I've about used

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up your credit," she said. "Ann, are you sure Colin wanted you to spend so much on me?"

"Goodness, yes. He's not ever stingy."

"It seems too bad to leave my home almost as soon as I've found it."

"You can't do without college, lamb. You'll love it."

"I love you," Susie said irrelevantly.

Ann parked the car in the driveway, and whistled hopefully. Lord Peter came tearing around the corner of the house and flung himself into her lap, but no other signs of life appeared. "Funny," Ann said to Susie. "Wonder where Colin is?" She spanked the pup absently and murmured, "Off with you, angel!" and climbed out.

Susie already was opening the back of the car to take out her bundles. "I'm so thrilled, Ann—I can't believe all these things belong to *me*! I've never had so many things in my life—let alone having them all at once. Oh, Ann, you're so nice to me!"

They made several trips to the house, taking all the packages into Susie's room. Then Ann left her to her unpacking, and murmured something about going for a walk. She exchanged her coat for a suede jacket, and, the sun warm on her bare head, started up the road toward the Home. There was a big orchard behind the house, where Ann loved to go to think. She wanted to do some heavy thinking, and luxuriate in a new idea. She wanted to see Colin and share it, but as he wasn't in evidence, that would have to wait.

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The orchard was deserted, as she had hoped, and she walked to the far end and flung herself down in the soft grass, basking in the sunlight. Beside her there was a comfortable hammock, slung between two trees, but Ann wanted to get close to earth. Presently Lord Peter came and frisked around her head, wanting to play. "Be still, imp," she ordered. "I'm not in the mood." He curled up beside her, and yawned widely. Ann yawned too. "Oh, Peter darling, I'm so happy," she confided to him. He opened one eye, looked at her briefly, then went back to sleep. "Not interested, huh? Well, I *am*!" she declared.

Ann didn't realize that her privacy had been invaded until the newcomer was almost upon her. Then she sat up, and smoothed her disheveled hair instinctively, for this was such a very neat lady. She decided to forget her resentment at being intruded upon, and be friendly. "Hullo," she said. "You're new in town, aren't you? I'm Ann Drake—Mrs. Colin Drake." She eyed her appraisingly. She was a rather lovely lady—authentic silver hair, beautifully arranged, small, clearly-chiseled features, milk-and-roses skin, and large bright blue eyes.

"The simple arrogance with which one says that in Port Drake! I know, my dear, from experience. I'm Millicent Roberts."

"I'm glad to know you," Ann said dutifully. She wasn't, really.

"Well—as we've met—so am I, to know you. Though I would have chosen to see you, without actually meeting you. Curiosity—desire to see one's successor—I don't know. You

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probably would have chosen the same, and Colin never would have arranged our meeting—but—as we have met ——”

“We’re civilized souls and will be polite about it,” Ann suggested.

Millicent was looking at Ann in frank appraisal. “You’re not at all what I expected, Ann. You don’t mind my calling you Ann, do you? I actually can’t call you Mrs. Drake! I’d expected you to be—forgive me—a rather giddy girl, that Colin should have adopted rather than married.”

Ann grimaced. “You must have been talking to dear Beulah. Oh, I’m sorry—I’d forgotten she is your friend—and we really aren’t on first name terms with each other.”

Millicent smiled. “You will be.”

Ann looked skeptical. “Either you’re misjudging me, or I don’t know Mrs. Bedelle.”

“You will be—if you’re willing. Beulah is a good friend, but a very nasty enemy, and it will pay you to cultivate her.”

“I don’t ‘cultivate’ people!” Ann exploded. “If they don’t like me, they needn’t ——”

“My dear child, take my advice. When you married the leading citizen of a small town, you incurred certain obligations, along with your rights and privileges. You can learn that the hard way if you really want to, but I’d advise against it.”

“Everyone else likes me all right,” Ann said rebelliously.

“I’m sure they do. Let’s be friends, Ann,” Millicent said, holding out a slender, well-tended hand.

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Ann took it, feeling unaccountably embarrassed. "I'd like to be," she said.

Millicent sat down in the hammock, and took off her hat, lifting her face toward the sun. Her clear skin met the sunlight unafraid—Ann decided she was younger than she had thought, misled by her hair. She also decided that Colin had done better in the matter of looks in his previous connections than when choosing her.

Ann took a packet of cigarettes out of her pocket, and proffered it. As Millicent took one, she smiled a little. "We'll sit down and smoke the pipe of peace," she murmured.

As Ann lit her own cigarette, she wondered a little what one talked about to one's husband's first wife. But she needn't have worried, as Millicent had no intention of letting the conversation get out of the direction of her own capable tongue. She made no explanation of what she was doing in Port Drake, but talked lightly and casually of various topics of general interest that occurred to her. When she finally dropped her verbal bombshell, it was so long exploding that it was quite a while before Ann recognized it for what it was.

"How do you like Colin's last book?"

"I always like Colin's books," Ann dodged the question neatly. His book that came out while they were in Hollywood really wasn't much. Of course, it was well done. Colin was incapable of turning out anything that was badly written—but that book, if written by any other writer, would have been dismissed by Ann with a 'So what?' or its equiva-

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lent. It had given Ann the impression that his mind was on something else when he wrote it. It probably had been—on Ann.

“Well, you needn’t be so nonchalant about it! Personally, I think it is the first bit of fiction that he’s written that’s been worth a hoot. Colin isn’t a fiction writer, you know—he’s a reporter, or an essayist. A biographer—or an historian, if you like. His novels have been pretty bad. No one on earth could believe for a minute in his heroines. They give you the impression that Colin never knew any girls. But Julie—ah, Julie——”

She continued to talk, but Ann didn’t hear her. Julie! Julie was the heroine of Colin’s new book—the one that wasn’t out yet. The one that Colin wouldn’t show her—the brief little book that Colin had thought the best thing he’d ever done. Colin had refused to show it to *her*, and here was Millicent, talking of it nonchalantly, naturally believing Ann knew it as well as she did. Ann froze up inside, and with an effort brought her attention back to Millicent, who was still talking.

“You must have taught him that, Ann, and made your own contribution to American literature. It’ll be a best seller, I’m sure——”

Ann wondered what it was she had taught him, and then she heard his voice. “Hi! Milly—your car’s at the gate. The mechanic said it was just a—— Oh, hullo, Ann. I didn’t know you were back.”

Millicent put her hat back on—at the proper angle, Ann noted, with detached admiration. She always had to have a

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mirror to do that. Then she stood up and said, "If my car's ready, I must run along. Thanks, Colin. Goodbye, Ann. It's been nice knowing you." She walked briskly down the path and out of the orchard. Ann and Colin stood looking after her.

When she was out of sight, Colin turned to Ann and said, "Oh, Ann-girl, how I've missed you!" He swept her into his arms and kissed her suddenly averted cheek. Then he stood back to look at her. "What's wrong, my dear? You aren't ill, are you?"

"No, I'm all right," Ann said, and thought detachedly that even her voice sounded frozen. All her anticipated pleasure at seeing Colin had evaporated, and her delighted joy in just being alive seemed to have turned to dust and ashes.

Together they walked back to the house. Colin made no explanation of Millicent's presence in Port Drake, and Ann would have died rather than question him. For the first time she knew jealousy, bitter and burning. She never had been jealous of Nina, somehow. Nina simply hadn't existed—she had been something ethereal and unreal until the wedding. Then she had been Jock's wife, and one simply wasn't jealous of a man's wife. But it seemed that one could be jealous of a man's former wife.

Only once did Ann speak on the way back to the house. "When is your book coming out, Colin?"

"In October sometime."

"You always get your copies before they go on sale, don't you?"

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"Hm? Oh, sure. The only reason I didn't last time was that they were sent to me to Port Drake, and of course I was in Hollywood."

Susie came running out of the house, and got between them, linking arms with them both. "Colin, aren't I beautiful?" she demanded.

He smiled at her. "Darling, you always have been a beautiful child—to us," he added.

"Beautiful character—I know," Susie retorted.

"Wait till you see her clothes," Ann said.

"Wait till you see the bills for them," Susie added darkly.

"Colin, you can't disadopt—unadopt—well, whatever I mean—anybody, can you?"

"I'll find out," Colin promised, laughing.

"Don't you dare—maybe you can!" Susie retorted.

"Do you people have any idea how swell it seems to me to have a family?"

Colin threw his book across the room, and poured himself a drink. Ann had gone to bed. Ann had gone to bed and hadn't kissed him good night. Hell! what was wrong with Ann? It couldn't be meeting Millicent—she had known about Millicent before, and had taken her existence with equanimity. It was too bad that he couldn't explain Millicent's presence in Port Drake to Ann, but he could scarcely tell her that she had been brought there to exert a little blackmail on Ann's behalf. She had done it rather well, too. Beulah had capitulated neatly, and probably could be

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counted on to be Ann's champion in the future. Colin was glad that he had remembered that Millicent had something on Beulah. He didn't know what it was, but it was apparently potent.

For the first time since he had known her, Ann seemed a stranger to Colin. Their life had been so perfect, and now she seemed to have bowed herself out of it.

Colin had been satisfied with what Ann had to give him. He wasn't worried about Jock—Jock was a romantic memory to Ann, and, he was confident, never would be anything else.

What could have upset Ann so?

A disquieting thought—had she met Jock in Seattle and decided that after all he was the only man she could love, and any makeshift was worse than nothing? Colin applied a few terse, Anglo-Saxon words to Jock, but found it didn't help any. It didn't matter what Jock was—Ann didn't apply tests to her love. She would love blindly, unreasoningly. Had he been a fool to think she would come to love him? Worse than a fool—an ineffectual fool. Colin smoked a last cigarette, and went to bed.

He lay sleepless for a long while, listening to Ann's regular breathing. Finally he dropped off into a doze, to be roused by a low moan from Ann's bed. In a moment he was awake, half out of bed, to find Ann fumbling with the light. He reached out and turned it on. "What is it, Ann? What's wrong?"

Ann stared at him, her eyes wide and dark in a face white as paper. "Something has happened to Jock—I have to go

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to him ——” She was out of bed, and hurrying toward her clothes.

Colin sprang up, and caught her as she swayed. Her body was cold, and she pushed him away. “I have to go to him—something dreadful has happened—oh, Colin, I’m frightened!” she wailed.

“Ann, Ann—be reasonable. Nothing has happened to Jock. You’ve had a nightmare. Get into bed, child—you’ll be ill ——”

“I must go—it wasn’t a dream. I tell you, something awful has happened—I must go to him ——” She was fumbling with her clothes, dogged determination on her face, but her hands were trembling.

Colin took the garments away from her, and held her firmly.

“Listen, Ann—you’ve had a bad dream. You can’t go—I won’t let you. Jock is all right.”

“How do you know he’s all right?” Ann was stubborn, like a bad child.

“What good could you do, even if he isn’t?” Colin demanded reasonably, but Ann was beyond reason.

“I’d be there.”

“Ann—listen. I’ll phone Jock. He’ll probably want my scalp for getting him up at this time of night, but I’ll phone him to prove to you he’s all right. Then will you go back to bed?”

“Phone him,” she said.

Colin cursed himself for a fool as he put in the call. Nina’s voice answered almost immediately. “Yes?”

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"Nina—sorry to disturb you—this is Colin. How is Jock?" Even as he said it, he realized how silly it sounded.

"He'll live. I just got in from the hospital," Nina said wearily. Then, in sudden comprehension, "What do you know about it?"

"About what? Sorry, Nina. I'm being stupid. What is wrong with Jock?"

"He was in an automobile accident. He had been drinking. There was a girl with him. She's dead." Nina's voice was toneless, repeating facts for Colin's enlightenment.

"I'm sorry, Nina. Is there anything I can do?"

"You might drive in tomorrow. I have to talk to someone or go mad. Eddie is in California, and I'm alone." Very forlorn she sounded—very hurt.

"Do you want me tonight?"

"No, I'll take a sedative and get some sleep. Good night, Colin."

He turned from the phone to Ann. "Jock will be all right. He was hurt in an auto accident. I'll take you in to see him tomorrow," he said soothingly. "Now will you go to bed, Ann?"

She seemed a little dazed. "Now I'll go to bed," she said docilely.

Colin brought a glass of water and two small white tablets to Ann, and she took them unquestioningly. "Stay here, Colin," she said, reaching out her hand.

He turned out the light and sat there, holding her hand. "It frightened me, Colin," Ann said. "I'm glad Jock is all right." Colin squeezed her hand reassuringly, and soon she

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was lying very still, breathing regularly. He felt a moment of regret for having given her a double dose of a sedative, but perhaps the results justified it.

Ann slept, but there was no more sleep for him that night. He put on a dressing-gown, and returned to the living room.

It was a long and very bitter night for Colin. He had reached his decision by the time the first rosy streaks of dawn appeared in the grey sky. He bathed then, and as he looked in the mirror while shaving, he saw that those long hours of mental turmoil had taken their toll. He observed with something of a shock that there were grey hairs at his temples. Of course they hadn't arrived overnight, but he had never noticed them before. "I look three years older than God," was his candid opinion.

Colin fixed breakfast, and took Susie's in to her on a tray. She was awake, and sitting up in bed, gloating over her reflection in the mirror opposite. She looked a little guilty when she saw Colin, and he smiled at her. "Wouldn't you like to be a lady of leisure and have breakfast in bed?" he inquired.

"I'd love it," she admitted. "You *are* a honey, Colin. No wonder such a nice girl as Ann married you."

"Aren't I just," he agreed.

He left, and looked in on Ann. She was awake, and she made a face at him. "I feel beastly," she greeted him. "Do I or do I not have a vague memory of your giving me some dope last night?"

"It seemed like a good idea at the time," Colin admitted.

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"I just took breakfast to Susie on a tray. Do you want to get up, or should I bring yours in here?"

"I'll get up. Maybe I'll feel more or less human after I have a shower. May I wear a negligee for breakfast?"

"It'll be a pleasure," he assured her.

Breakfast was a rather silent meal. Colin didn't want to be the one to bring up the subject of the previous night's alarms and excursions, and he didn't know if Ann remembered it. The morning air was chilly, and he had built a fire in the library fireplace, so they went in there for their post-breakfast cigarettes. Ann finally said, "What did Nina say last night, Colin?"

"She said that Jock had been in a smash-up—that he was drunk—and that the girl with him had been killed."

"Poor Jock," Ann said softly.

"Poor girl," Colin corrected her, rather sharply. Then he remembered his decision. "Ann—last night—Ann, how did you know something had happened to Jock? Was it a dream, or what?"

Ann shook her head. "It wasn't a dream. It was—rather awful. I don't know how I knew, but I knew he was in dreadful trouble, and ——"

"That tears it," Colin said abruptly. He got to his feet and stood looking down at her. "I haven't any right to you, Ann—not when you're so closely bound to Jock as that. I wouldn't let myself believe it, but—well, this sort of forces belief."

Ann looked at him incredulously. "What are you saying, Colin?"

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"Just that you may have your freedom, whenever you want it."

"You can't do that, Colin. Maybe you are bored with me—maybe you don't think I have a mind—but I have more of a claim on you than that. You have to guard me from now on, Colin. I seem so careless left to myself."

"I would always guard you—with my life," Colin said. "Whether you were mine or another man's. But why from now on?"

"If you want your child to be born this time ——"

"Oh Ann—no," Colin said. "It's too soon—it's not safe for you. You aren't strong enough. You can't mean it—that would be—positively criminal carelessness!"

Ann twinkled at him, and for a moment there was a flash of their old comradery. "There's been no official confirmation, but I'm reasonably sure. And it was—as Joan puts it—with malice aforethought. You aren't so displeased as that, are you, Colin? You don't really want to be rid of me, do you?"

"I want to be rid of you? Ann, are you mad?" he asked in amazement.

"Just a little annoyed is all," she assured him, deliberately misunderstanding. "I'll tell you now—though I was too hurt yesterday—that it burned me up plenty that you should let Millicent read your manuscript and not let me so much as sniff at it. She was telling me about your new novel yesterday—and naturally I couldn't admit to her that I hadn't so much as glimpsed it, when she practically knew it by heart. But why did you do it, Colin? Why?"

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"Look, Ann," Colin said urgently, "would you mind if we get things straightened out one at a time?"

"No, I wouldn't mind."

"First—when I offered you your freedom, it was an offer born of a sleepless night and the conviction that it was what you wanted. Do you?"

"I've answered that. No."

Colin swallowed hard, and was silent for a few moments, lest his voice betray his emotion. It was steady by the time he continued, "Do you really want a baby now?"

"Of course, Colin. I made up my mind to that months ago—when I was in the hospital. One of my first conscious thoughts."

"Was the reason you were so nasty to me yesterday that you thought I'd been seeing and consulting Millicent about my book behind your back?"

Ann nodded, and looked a little ashamed.

"Ann, Ann, and I thought you trusted me! Of course I haven't — Yesterday, while I was away, Millicent called. Mrs. Larsen was here cleaning, and she knew Millicent, of course—she showed her into the library to wait for me. Millicent—well, I guess she was looking for something in the desk, and she found the carbon copy of my book manuscript, and had read it before I returned." There was a little silence, and then Colin went on, with a chuckle, "Millicent is honest, anyway. She told me that you must be a much better wife than she had been—because at long last I seemed to have learned about women, as witness the book."

"Colin," Ann said softly.

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“ Yes? ”

“ Will you come and get the kiss I didn’t give you last night? ”

“ My dear,” said Colin, as he took her in his arms.

Later, Colin said, “ I say, Ann—I promised Nina I’d drive in today. Do you want to come along and see Jock? ”

Ann was silent for a moment, considering it. Then she said, “ I think I’ll stay here, Colin.”

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ANN FELT EXHAUSTED. THERE HAD BEEN TOO MUCH emotion of conflicting sorts in the last twenty-four hours. The dream—if it was a dream—about Jock had been a pretty shattering experience, and when it was followed by Colin's offer of divorce, that she could counter only by the news of her pregnancy, it had brought her to a point of tension that was almost unbearable. Even though she was certain that Colin hadn't wanted a divorce, the very fact of his offering it had shown her that they were not so close as she had believed.

Now, although she wondered a little about Jock—wondered how badly he was hurt, and if he would leave the hospital only to go to jail on a manslaughter charge, that was not her first concern. It was as if that psychic interval, frightening in itself, were the climax of their long relationship—a culmination that had strangely broken the spell that bound them, and left her indifferent, as though Jock were a stranger, or someone she had known so long ago it was almost beyond memory. The most important aspect of it now was Colin, and how he felt. They had worked out a reconciliation of sorts, of course, and had cleared up the

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most flagrant misunderstandings, but he might still feel some constraint between them. She wished she had gone into Seattle with Colin, so that she would have been with him longer—she needn't have gone to see Jock, Colin could have dropped her off at Connie's while he went on to see Nina as he had promised. This whole thing must be pretty appalling for Nina.

Susie was curled up in front of the library fire, reading, and Ann was restless. When the doorbell rang, she brightened. Perhaps it was Joan. Of course she couldn't talk to Joan about any of this, but her very presence would be comforting.

It was Mrs. Bedelle. "Dear God," Ann said inwardly, reproachfully, "haven't I enough to bear already?" Aloud she said, "How nice. Won't you come in?"

"Good morning, Mrs. Drake. You'll forgive my informal hour for calling, won't you? I'm so rushed, and I thought I really must come to see you and find out how you were getting along."

"I'm well, thank you. May I take your coat? There's a hint of fall in the air already, isn't there?"

Mrs. Bedelle was looking about her with quick, birdlike glances. "What a charming place you have! So simple and homelike."

Ann's reaction was to feel irrationally that she should have gone in for Second Empire, or at least Georgian furnishings. She said, "I'm so glad you like it."

Mrs. Bedelle produced a capacious knitting bag, and looked for a comfortable chair. Ann suggested that the sun-

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room would be warmer, and led her in there. She got her settled in the softest chair, and looked for her own knitting, calling down silent imprecations on women—disliked women—who paid calls in the morning.

"Where is the child?" Mrs. Bedelle asked, looking around as though expecting to see Susie crouched beneath a chair.

"Susie? She's reading in the library." And *what* she is reading is her own business, my lady.

"I think it's so *noble* of you and Mr. Drake to adopt her. Do you realize what a wonderful thing you are doing for her?"

"I hadn't thought of it that way. We're doing something rather nice for ourselves," Ann said gently.

"It's taking such a risk, though—not knowing anything of her ancestry."

"We believe in environment conquering heredity, any day. Offering ten to one odds, if you're interested," she added wickedly.

Mrs. Bedelle clucked, and said, "So amusing!"

Ann wondered a little at Mrs. Bedelle's change of heart. She seemed determined to be friendly—if it killed her, Ann thought. It might not kill Beulah, but it was aging Ann fast.

"We've missed you at church lately, Mrs. Drake. You really must see that the child has a good Christian home, you know. It's so important that she be trained properly. I hear you're sending her to college. Don't you think it's taking a great risk? Colleges are such—such——"

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"Hotbeds of iniquity?" Ann suggested politely.

Mrs. Bedelle chose to find that amusing, too. "Really, Mrs. Drake, you mustn't scoff. Some of our young people here—you simply wouldn't believe the things they learned at that university ——"

"Perhaps I would. It wasn't so very long ago I was a student there myself, you know." Ann was deliberately egging her on, and suddenly she remembered Millicent, and Millicent's advice to cultivate Beulah. "I'm sorry, Mrs. Bedelle. I'm being very provoking, I'm afraid. But the University isn't such a bad place—people even get educated there, you know ——"

"Educated in a lot of things they shouldn't know ——"

"Do you think knowledge—of any sort—ever hurt anyone? I don't. A good background, and a stable, well-balanced mind, and they know what to accept and what to reject. This younger generation isn't nearly so bad as it's painted."

"You're very young yourself, aren't you, Mrs. Drake?" Ann knew she was young—in fact, she insisted rather often that she didn't feel very grown up, most of the time—but nothing irked her more than to be told in a patronizing tone that she was very young. It made her feel like a case of arrested development. But she took a firm grip on her temper, and knit very fast for a moment or two. Then Mrs. Bedelle continued, "Might I call you Ann? It seems a little silly for us to be so formal. You must call me Beulah, you know. All my young friends do." She looked very arch, and Ann knew she was supposed to protest that Mrs.

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Bedelle was very young herself. In a moment, to her own horror, she was doing so.

Susie stuck her head through the door. "Ann darling—about lunch? I'm starved. Oh, how do you do, Mrs. Bedelle."

"Hello, Susie. How sweet you look, child. Your hair is so pretty—is it a permanent?"

Susie swallowed once, and Ann knew the obvious retort tempted her. She felt sure she would have made it, in Susie's place, but Susie knew her place better than Ann would have. "Yes, Ann and Colin are determined that I should do them credit when I go to school. My hair was awfully straight before, you know."

"Susie dear, would you mind getting lunch? You'll have luncheon with us, won't you, Mrs.—uh—Beulah?"

"Gracious, I didn't realize it was so late. No, thank you, Ann—I must be running along. Do come down and see us, won't you? Our little place isn't so grand as yours, of course, but it's a sweet little place, and it's Home!"

"I'd love to," Ann murmured, and wondered how many lies she'd told since Beulah arrived.

Just before she got to the door, Beulah turned and gave voice to something that had been worrying her—"Do you let her call you by your first names?"

Ann smiled a little.

"What else should she call us?"

Beulah apparently couldn't think of an answer right off, for she smiled and said vaguely, "Of course. You will come to see us, won't you, Ann? Marvin is so fond of you."

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Goodbye, my dear ——” She fluttered her hand kittenishly, and left.

Ann stood staring at the door after it was shut. Who, in heaven’s name, was Marvin, who was so fond of her? It wasn’t until half an hour later that she realized with a start that Marvin was Skippy.

“Ann,” Susie said, “let’s have a weinie roast at the beach. We haven’t done that for ages.”

“Okay, darlin’. Do you want to run into town and get some food? Get whatever you want, and I’ll change into slacks and a sweater and meet you in an hour on the beach.”

By the time Susie returned, Ann had a driftwood fire going in the sheltered cove on the beach at the foot of the hill, and two sharpened sticks to roast the weinies on. Susie had a sumptuous array of delicatessen store packages, which Ann regarded with some amusement. “You must be hungry, darlin’,” she observed.

“I love to eat,” Susie said enthusiastically, “and I simply lose my head in the delicatessen.”

It was fun eating smoky hot dogs and pickles and olives and potato salad alongside a bright fire. Susie was a good companion, anyway. Susie was really rather a swell person. That brought Ann to the point of asking her something. “By the way, kid, what are you taking up at school?”

“Home Ec, I guess,” Susie answered, through her hot dog. “I might as well. Then, if I have to, I can always teach it.”

“If you have to? What did you have in mind?”

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"Well, what I really want is to get married and have a flock of kids," Susie replied.

Ann regarded her with some amusement. Susie looked such an infant—especially so with a dab of mustard placed, in an excess of zeal, on her tip-tilted nose.

"Got the prospective husband and father picked out?" she inquired.

"Sure," Susie answered. "He doesn't know it, but that's all right. He'll find out. That's why I've got to get myself educated so he won't think I'm just another little dope."

"You're rather a dear little dope, at that," Ann answered affectionately. She didn't take Susie particularly seriously. After all, she was a child.

They lingered a long while on the beach, after lunch. Ann had brought down a robe to lie on, and a couple of pillows, and it was comfortable there, in the lee of the hill, the sun shining but not hot. Ann smoked and listened to Susie talk. She talked a lot—about her clothes, about what college would be like, about whether or not she would have fun at dances.

"I'm quite a good dancer, you know," she said seriously. "Even Alan said so."

"Even Alan—who's he to talk? I never noticed that he was so swell. He's too big to be a really good dancer. Colin's much better."

"Oh well," Susie said tolerantly, "Colin's your husband, and Alan's only your brother."

Ann grinned lazily, and murmured, "Maybe you've got something there . . . do you mind if I go to sleep, Susie?"

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If you get bored, you needn't stay . . . but I'm awfully sleepy. Colin gave me some dope last night, and I don't think its effects are all gone yet." She turned over on her face, and promptly went to sleep.

19

JOCK WOULDN'T FACE A MANSLAUGHTER CHARGE. IT DEVELOPED that the girl had been driving the car. Jock knew, he said, that he was too drunk to drive. The girl had been, too, but she hadn't realized it, and Jock had been in no condition to realize it for her. That was about all that Colin told Ann about it. He would have told her more of his long talk with Nina, but strangely enough, that was all Ann wanted to know. She said she was glad he was all right, of course. They'd been friends for a long time.

In October, Colin's book came out. Ann was enchanted with it, and surprisingly enough, the reviewers were too, for the most part. They were almost apologetic about it. They mentioned the plot, said rather diffidently that it sounded corny, and went on to urge immediate reading of it. It had a mild success, and went into a number of editions.

"Isn't Julie darling?" Ann enthused to Connie. "I think she's one of the swellest characters I ever encountered in fiction ——"

"I wouldn't go around mentioning it, if I were you," Connie retorted drily. "I don't think it would be at all a good idea—people might think things."

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"What do you mean?" Ann asked, puzzled.

"Darling, you're a sweet child and I love you, but there are times when you're a bit annoying. You don't mean to stand there and tell me that you didn't notice it ——"

"Notice what?"

"That Julie is you—not the plot, but the character—if ever a living person was committed to paper."

"You're crazy," Ann said flatly. "Connie, angel, you haven't noticed anything lately—I mean, to indicate that you're a bit tetchy in the haid?"

"I'm all right," Connie answered.

"But Julie is darling," Ann protested.

"Well—we like you, too, you know."

Ann read the book over again. She couldn't see any resemblance—but she hoped that she looked as nice to Colin as his heroine did to her.

Then a number of disquieting things happened. Taffy was divorcing Neil. Ann couldn't believe it. Taffy and Neil—an ideal couple, ideally in love. Finally Colin lost patience with her. "Ann, couldn't you see that they weren't getting along? It was so very clear to me, and I wasn't living in the same house with them."

"It's—it's almost as bad as if Connie were divorcing Davey."

"There's not the slightest parallel there. Connie and Davey are perfectly happy, and probably will stay that way all of their lives. Of course, Connie is a good wife ——"

"And Taffy isn't?" Ann flashed at him.

"Taffy is a nice person, but heaven preserve me from a

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wife like that," Colin observed. They quarreled then, quite violently. Colin wouldn't be specific in his accusations. He maintained that Ann should allow him a chivalrous silence on some subjects. He told Ann that she shouldn't expect everyone she knew to fit neatly into the scenario she had mentally written for them. He told her that people wouldn't fit into preconceived categories, that everyone was different and wouldn't conform to type.

Then Susie came home for Christmas—only she was now Suzy. The sorority had changed her name. "Suzy" was more chic, she explained. The few months had altered her a great deal. She was still quite as devoted to Ann and Colin, but her devotion was no longer childlike. She was very poised and sure of herself—and much, much prettier.

When Ann got her alone, she questioned her. "How's everything—I mean really, Susie—I mean Suzy," she said, making a mental adjustment.

Suzy laughed at her. "Susie and Suzy sound exactly alike, Ann—you needn't buzz like a bee to make me know you're spelling it that way! Everything's grand, and I love school, but I think a year of it is going to be quite enough for me——"

"Why?"

"Well——"

"Oh—you mean the getting married and having a family. You have plenty of time, honey. Have you changed your mind about the prospective husband?"

"Oh no—that's definitely settled. Even he knows it now," Suzy said reflectively.

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"Did you tell him?"

Suzy laughed, and her dimples were delightful. She seemed much plumper, and rounder, though she was still very slender. "He told me," she said.

"Who is he?" Ann asked.

"Oh—a man," Suzy said vaguely. "A very nice man, Ann."

"I'm sure of it," Ann said.

Strange as it seemed, Suzy seemed quite grown up enough to be talking of marriage. Ann couldn't figure it out—unless she actually was in love. That matured people quickly, and Suzy had grown several years in a few short months.

Suzy had reverted to childhood sufficiently to go coasting on the hill the afternoon of Christmas Eve, so she wasn't there when Alan came in. Colin mixed a Tom and Jerry, and they sat around the fireplace, sipping the luscious brew and talking leisurely. Alan had spent the last two months ashore, and was developing into a first class land-lubber, he said. Ann wasn't paying much attention to the conversation, but was drowsily thinking about what fun it would be to have a baby. She had decided long since that she would like a boy, who looked like Colin, best of all, but she'd settle for a girl who didn't look like Colin. Colin's looks were very nice so long as they were masculine, but a girl would be under a distinct handicap —

"You see, I'm going to marry Suzy," Alan said.

Ann dropped her cup, and sat up very straight. "You're not! Alan Tucker, how can you say such a thing!"

Alan grinned at her amiably. "Now darling, you know

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you love Suzy—don't go thinking she isn't good enough for your only brother ——”

“You're not good enough for her!” Ann said passionately. She looked at this long-adored brother of hers with something very close to hatred in her eyes. “You're too old for her. You're away at sea most of the time. She'd have a hell of a life ——”

“Hold on, baby,” Alan said, and he wasn't grinning now, nor did he look particularly amiable. “I'm twice her age, and I know it. But I don't think it matters very much. I'm very fit, and exceptionally healthy. And I'm taking a shore job next summer and we'll be married then. You can't stop us, you know. Suzy's eighteen now—she'll be nearly nineteen next summer.”

Ann put on quite a scene. With a detached part of her mind, she thought that she was getting into the habit. She had always been so easy to get along with, too. Maybe it was being pregnant that ruined her disposition. But even while she was thinking these things, she kept fighting with Alan. She hadn't ever fought with Alan before. She hadn't fought with anyone.

Finally Alan left—not permanently, but merely as if he found the atmosphere unbearable. Colin tried to soothe Ann. “Honey, don't upset yourself so. There's nothing we can do about it. We could forbid Suzy to marry Alan, and she probably would do as we wished, because she's so grateful for what we've done for her. But if she loves Alan—and somehow, I don't doubt that she does—she would just wait a few years and marry him anyway. Suzy is older than

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eighteen, you know—I've often said that in many ways she is older than you—and she knows what she wants. If she wants Alan, let her have him—and don't make them wait too long. Alan isn't as old as I—but he's an awful lot older than Suzy."

Ann didn't like Alan's giving up his job, either. She had a deep conviction—obtained from reading a large number of sea stories—that sailors had a special love for the sea, and couldn't be happy ashore. Colin wasn't so sure. If Alan had found his happiness at sea for a good many years, that still didn't mean that he wasn't entitled to a normal family life. He could understand how that might seem the only important thing to Alan now.

"What kind of a job can he do, anyway? He's a sailor," Ann said.

"The Drake Line will have a place for him—where he'll be valuable," Colin said.

That too was distasteful to Ann. "Just because his brother-in-law owns the Drake Line, he snags himself a soft job," Ann said rebelliously.

"I don't own the Drake Line," Colin said. "I haven't for a long time."

"What?" Ann said.

"Didn't I ever tell you?" Colin said. "For years now, the employees have been getting stock given to them once a year. I still have a few shares left, but it's nearly a hundred percent employee owned and operated. They're the people who built it up and made it successful—they're the ones who are entitled to the profits."

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For a minute Ann stared at him, then she began to laugh. She laughed so hard tears came to her eyes, and finally Colin became alarmed, and shook her, hard. Gradually she sobered. "That's really the funniest thing I've ever heard of, darling," she gasped. "You're a communist! And here I've been holding you up as the outstanding example of why I believe in the capitalistic system."

"I really didn't feel I had any right to the Drake Line," Colin began.

"Darling, please don't explain. Never mind. Whatever you do, that's all right with me. But you don't mind if I laugh once in a while, do you? And you win, Colin—I won't say a word about Alan marrying Suzy. I admittedly haven't any sense, and why should I try to run other people's lives? Not that I can—not a single one of them is willing to follow my script."

When Alan came in later with Suzy, Ann kissed them both warmly, and said, "Darlings, forgive me for being dopey, will you? It's my delicate condition, you know. I know you'll be very happy, and we'll have a really gorgeous bang-up wedding next summer for you. You'll see—it'll make Port Drake sit up and take notice."

20

DR. BANCROFT LOOKED SHARPLY AT ANN THROUGH HIS glasses. "You're got to stop all this smoking and drinking," he commanded.

Ann sat straight, in indignant protest. "I hardly ever drink," she retorted, "and you told me yourself it wouldn't hurt, and that smoking wouldn't either."

"Well, I've changed my mind . . . you've got to stop it, understand? That's all," he ended, getting up to dismiss her.

She started toward the door, and paused with one hand on the knob as he added, "And send your husband in to see me, will you?"

"Why?" Ann inquired sarcastically. "Do you want to tell him to stop smoking and drinking too?"

"Send him in," the doctor barked.

So Ann and Colin moved into Seattle. Ann didn't want to, but Colin was firm. Dr. Bancroft had seriously alarmed him about Ann's condition, and had recommended Dr. King in Seattle as the best man on the coast. So they moved into a service apartment, where Ann didn't have anything to do—except sew and knit, and go to see the doctor once a

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week. Once a week seemed excessive to Ann, but she was one against two, and it seemed impossible to defy two such firm men as Colin and Dr. King. They didn't even have to unite to defeat her. Colin had never met the doctor, but had had one telephone conversation with him, and their alliance was formed.

Ann seemed to have gotten over thinking about Jock. Once in a while his name was mentioned, and she gave him a thought or two, but she never thought of him at all any more, unless someone else mentioned him first. She wondered if it was because she hadn't seen him for so long, but that idea was dispelled when he called one afternoon. Colin was working, so after exchanging only the briefest of greetings with Jock, he excused himself and left the room. Ann was lying on the davenport, resting, as she did so much of the time now. She regarded Jock rather critically. He was still big and handsome as ever, but he seemed to have lost his glamor for her eyes. She found herself being rather impatient with him. She wondered if what Colin had said was true—if she did see people as she thought they ought to be, rather than as they were. She had assigned a hero's role to Jock, and somehow he hadn't lived up to it. Ann wondered why it had seemed all right to her before, that Jock was unhappily married and still retained a romantic attachment for her—suddenly she found herself not quite believing in that romantic attachment. Jock didn't have her, so she looked desirable—although, she thought wryly, she certainly didn't look very desirable at the moment. But suddenly he seemed rather contemptible. He had had everything he

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wanted—he had gotten what he went after, and if it wasn't what he had expected, that was his tough luck, wasn't it? Nobody had forced him to marry Nina, despite those rather bitter words of hers Ann had overheard. She thought to herself, "He's a bit of a heel, really—he always has been—and just because he's so doggone gorgeous, I never noticed it before. It isn't good for men to be so handsome—they think they don't need anything else. And usually they don't." Aloud she said, "What's happened to your ambition, Jock?"

He ignored the question with an irrelevant comment. "You've changed an awful lot, Ann."

"That's temporary," Ann said drily. "The doctor assures me that I'll get my figure back."

Jock looked impatient. "Don't be absurd, Ann. You know that's not what I mean. It's just—I don't know how to put it—I don't feel I know you very well any more."

"Perhaps you don't," Ann said.

"You act so funny—as if you didn't like me any more ——" Jock said, tentatively advancing the statement to be brushed aside by her.

"You're amazingly perspicacious all at once," Ann said. And so am I, she thought. Amazingly.

Jock stood up and said stiffly, "Very well, I'll leave. You won't have to throw me out. I might have known Colin couldn't resist telling you—he's such a God-damned self-righteous bloke—he couldn't resist telling you, so *he'd* look all the better to you ——" And Jock flung himself out of the apartment.

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Tell me what, Ann wondered. And then she had a sudden, sickening realization of what it might be that Colin could have told her about Jock—and hadn't. And she knew that she would never ask him—never think about it again, if she could help it—and try to bury the memory of a Jock that she once had loved unsmirched by the conjecture that she could at least keep from becoming a certainty.

Once Millicent called on Ann while Colin was out. She brought her a crocheted afghan, and Ann was touched, and rather embarrassed. There was such a lot of work on it, and she didn't really know her very well. Millicent seemed a little embarrassed, too. "I'm sure you'll be all right, Ann," she said.

"Of course I will," Ann said. In spite of all the alarms that were going on around her, she hadn't a doubt of it. She didn't feel very well, but then she didn't expect to. She'd be exceedingly glad when it was all over.

"You're making Colin very happy, you know," Millicent said, and there seemed a trace of wistfulness in her voice.

"Having a baby, you mean?" Ann was dense.

"Well—that too, of course. I'm glad you are, Ann. Colin is a nice person, you know."

"I know," Ann said. And then, unforgivably, but she couldn't help it, she asked, "Why did you divorce him?"

"Because I didn't have any sense," Millicent said grimly. There was a little silence, then she rose to go. "Take care of yourself, Ann. But Colin will take care of you, I know. Be grateful that your husband is adult. It's quite a help."

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Ann was thoughtful. Millicent had told her a great deal in those few words. She had wondered a little about Millicent's present husband. Colin knew him. He hadn't said much about him. He had said, "You'd probably like him," in a tone that indicated that he didn't, and Ann had wondered why at the time. Now she wondered if—perhaps—he might be rather like Jock. It was quite possible. Jock's weak character wasn't unique.

Nina called, too. She brought gifts for the baby, and exclaimed rapturously over the things Ann already had. "I love babies," she said. "Don't you?"

"Um—medium," Ann said. "I expect to love this one. Why don't you have a baby, Nina?"

"Somehow I don't think Jock would make an ideal father," Nina said grimly.

"You're getting along all right, aren't you?" Ann said, then added apologetically, "I'm sorry, Nina—it isn't any of my business. But—well, I hope you are."

"Jock is considerably chastened," Nina said. "Sure—I love the guy, in the words of the popular song, but then I never did have any sense."

Well, well, Ann thought. A steady file of people coming into the apartment to confess to her that they didn't have any sense. The implication—flattering if absurd—was that she did. Ann knew better. She didn't have any sense at all, but she certainly got the breaks.

Colin was swell to her. He was watchful and considerate, and he never let her doubt for a minute that he loved her beyond anything in the world. He teased her, too, of course.

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He told her his favorite definition of an optimist, one eye on her bulky figure. "The girl, seven months along, who rubbed vanishing cream on her tummy," he said. "I might be willing to try it," Ann admitted a trifle grimly. "Gosh, it'll be nice to be thin again!"

*

Colin drove the car into the garage in the basement of the Medical-Dental Building, and Ann said, "I'll meet you at Frederick's in an hour or so. I don't know how long I'll be."

"Oh, I'm coming up with you," Colin answered.

"You *are* not!" she retorted. "Why—you'd be embarrassed to death. And how the women in the waiting-room hate any stray male who gets in by chance——"

"I'll be able to bear up under it, I imagine," Colin answered drily.

"But why, Colin? It's silly for you to come up."

"Oh," he answered airily, "I understand that women always fall in love with their obstetricians, and I want to look him over and find out if he's worthy of you."

"Colin Drake, you've been reading my *Vogues*," Ann said, scandalized.

"Dearest, you sound as if I'd been reading your mail! Sure I've been reading your *Vogues*—how else do you think I get my delicate ideas of feminine psychology?"

"I thought you got them from me," Ann said.

"Lord, no!" Colin said. "You didn't think I understood you, did you?"

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"Uh huh," Ann admitted. "I'll feel a lot more comfortable now that I know you don't!"

"Dope," Colin said fondly.

That was the last very clear memory Ann had of the day. She saw the doctor, and the next thing she knew Colin was driving fast to the hospital, trying not to show his alarm. "But after all," Ann said, "lots of people have toxemia. I've read lots about it—it isn't necessarily dangerous. Not when there's a good doctor in charge."

Later, when she was in bed, and momentarily unattended save by Colin, some of his obvious panic infected her, and she remembered more of what she had read about toxemia. "Look, Colin," she said, "if I look as if I were going to have a convulsion, shove a towel between my teeth, will you?"

Colin rang frantically for a nurse, and when she appeared said:

"Get me a special nurse, will you? Three of them, so she won't be left alone."

The nurse was calm. "If you'll come down to the desk ——" she said.

"And leave my wife?" Colin's voice was anguished.

"I'll stay with her. She's all right. You just run along now. You'd just be a nuisance here. Wouldn't he, Mrs. Drake?"

Ann looked doubtful, but dutifully agreed. When Colin had gone, the nurse said cozily, "These fathers—they're just alike, the lot of them. They usually decide at the eleventh hour that they don't want a child—never did want

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a child—it's foolish for anybody to have a child. They don't think of that when it would do some good."

Ann grinned feebly. "We both want this child," she said.

"Well, good," said the nurse. "Glad to see you haven't lost your nerve. If there's anything I hate more than nervous fathers, it's hysterical mothers."

"I'm noted for being a model patient," Ann said, "and I don't dare do anything to spoil my record."

Ann was weak, but bound she would talk. "Colin, don't you think it was smart of me to have twins, seeing as we can't have any more? Don't you think so, Colin?"

"You're a smart girl, darling—no question about it," Colin answered, uneasily wondering how Ann knew, so soon, that she couldn't have another child.

"Are they beautiful, Colin? Does the boy look like you and the girl like me?"

Colin had seen those two forlorn scraps of humanity before they went into the incubators, and privately thought he had never seen anything so awful in his life. He couldn't tell Ann that, of course. The poor lamb was going to have a tough enough fight as it was, without knowing that. Colin had heard—he had an uneasy feeling he even had written—about the quick surge of paternal pride born in a man's heart when first he viewed his child. But he had felt nothing like that. Of course he wanted them to have the best possible care, because he felt responsibility for them, but he had more sincere love for their puppy than for these offspring

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of his. He wondered, a little worried, if there were something wrong with him. Obviously he should feel something more than pity for them. He was silent so long that Ann worried, and, weak as she was, became insistent. "What do they look like, Colin?"

"Just—just like babies," he answered feebly. They didn't, of course. They looked like nothing human, but at least he could tell Ann they looked like babies. By the time she saw them, they would have improved. They couldn't fail to improve some.

* * *

Ann was getting impatient. She was feeling pretty well, and she wanted to be up and around. Most of all, she wanted to see her children. Children—it had a nice sound. Much nicer than child, really. She was proud of herself for having two at once.

"I want to name her Margaret," she said. "I hope she'll be as nice as Margaret Duncan. And, Colin—would you—I mean, do you want to name him Colin?"

"I'd rather not. Not unless you especially want it. I think it's a handicap to a child to suffer under the indignity of 'Junior.'"

Ann nodded wisely.

"I do, too," she agreed. "Of course, Colin's one of the fancy names you're supposed to avoid in naming your children, anyway—but—well, I've always liked Michael for a name—although it's another one of the fancy ones—but after all, there's your father to name him after. I think

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Michael Drake is a nice name—Michael Drake, Second—much better than Colin Drake, Junior.”

Colin grinned at her. “If you want to be strictly accurate, darling, I think it’s more like Seventeenth than Second—but we needn’t worry about his numerical place in the line. He’ll be the only Michael Drake around at present.”

“Won’t we be a nice family, Colin? Practically ideal, I think. A boy and a girl—why, nobody could ask for anything more.”

“I couldn’t,” Colin said.

*

Ann and Colin were sitting on the rug in front of the fireplace, each holding a baby. Margaret and Michael, perhaps a little backward because of their poor start, were just beginning to walk, at fifteen months. Michael clutched Ann’s outstretched finger desperately, as he teetered a little on his still uncertain legs. Ann regarded him fondly. He was such a beautiful baby, though he looked just like her. “Well,” she frequently said defensively, “I was a beautiful baby, too.”

She looked across at Margaret, who was hanging onto both Colin’s hands, and standing on her tiptoes. “Do you think she’s going to be a ballet-dancer?” she asked, a little worried. “I wouldn’t like that much.”

The twins had reversed Ann’s express desire. Michael looked like her, and Margaret like Colin. “Colin, do you s’pose she’s going to have your nose? Your nose is perfectly

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lovely on you, but it would take an awful lot of character for a girl to live down a nose like that!"

"She's going to have a lot of character," Colin said pridefully. "And she hasn't got much nose of any sort yet."

Ann leaned and kissed the back of Michael's neck. "Be a big man and walk to Daddy," she murmured to him.

At the same time Margaret let go of Colin's hands, and the two babies staggered drunkenly toward each other, passed, and with a final burst of speed tumbled flat, each into a parent's lap, where they were picked up and hugged.

Ann kissed Margaret, and looked across to Michael, who was clambering up to Colin's shoulder, his father's hand holding him steady. She looked around the room, and found it good. Here within her reach was everything she could ever want. And suddenly she knew a great truth, that had been developing a long, long while, and finally had blossomed into something incredibly beautiful.

"Colin," she said softly, "I do love you."

THE END

